

Winter 1995

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GAY COMMUNITY NEWS

GAY RIGHTS
SPECIAL RIGHTS

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FOR SUBSCRIBERS AND FRIENDS

GAY COMMUNITY NEWS

Dear Readers and Friends,

We hope this winter 1995 issue of *Gay Community News* provides a little subversive counterpoint to the horrifying rhetoric out there...as we keep working to unpack and confront the messages in rightwing and mainstream assaults on queers, people of color, and women. We're interested in your opinions on the articles in this edition, and as always, we welcome letters and other submissions.

...On another note, while we had hoped to be producing monthly issues by this time, we cannot do so until we raise enough money to underwrite the paper for at least one year, and to hire staff in editorial and development positions. This means raising \$100,000 over our current operating budget, which now only supports one staff member and relies on volunteer labor. We intend to reach our goal through direct-mail subscription drives, events such as those planned during our Out/Write queer writers' conference this year, foundation support, and—of course—outreach to small and large donors.

Until we reach our financial goal, *Gay Community News* will remain quarterly. A \$35 subscription still guarantees you 10 packed issues—whether we continue for some time as a quarterly or make the leap to a monthly in the near future.

We thank you all for your support and subversive tendencies, and hope you'll continue to participate in/challenge/talk to/dissent from/give money to/join/tell your friends about—your very best queer paper.

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For the Record: The Bigot Buster photo in Vol 20 #3 should have been credited to Richard Isaac and the Helms collage was done by Sherry Edwards

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Letters

Response to Michael Bronski

Dear Friends in Struggle at GCN,

When GCN resumed publication, I was thrilled by the return of one of the only periodicals to place our struggles as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people within the context of our struggles against all forms of domination. Thus I was disturbed by the divisive tone and misrepresentative content of Michael Bronski's article "Queer and Present Danger: Gay conservatives, Sex and the Christianization of the Gay movement."

Yes, it is important to analyze the increasing visibility of conservatives as "spokespeople" of our gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities. It is vital to say how they don't represent many of us—not just in their views, but in their privileged vantage points of race, gender, economic and social class. But to convey the whole picture, we must look at those who appoint "spokespeople," such as the commercial media outlets who turn to certain people time and time again, portraying them as experts.

Instead, Bronski, at the same time that he affirms that Liebman, Sullivan, Bawer, White, et al do not represent all gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, treats them as representative of Christianity. Christianity is thus our greatest enemy, a uniform monolith diametrically opposed to our lives and liberation. There is, however, a great diversity among conservatives and among people of faith. While many conservatives derive their views from their belief in God, many others do not. And many of us base our liberal, progressive, and radical beliefs in our faith traditions.

For me, and for many others, we cannot leave either our faith or our queerness behind. Only by maintaining both within us are we integral and whole. Each informs the other, so that our queerness is based in our faith, and our faith is based in our queerness. In this process, both are changed. Mel White, among others, writes from this context, for an audience struggling to reconcile their faith and their sexuality in the light of the dominant voices in faith and queer communities.

Necessarily, we acknowledge the exclusivity and hate, racism, sexism, and fear of our bodies and our sexuality that have permeated so many of our traditions' histories and presents. But these forms that our traditions have taken in the hands of human beings are not the whole of our traditions. There is just as long a history of prophets and others reclaiming the social justice inherent in these same traditions. In grappling with the elements of domination today, our traditions empower us to struggle for far-reaching social justice, including for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people.

Neither is "the gay liberation movement" a faith with only one path. As people of faith, we also bring our own unique contributions to movement for queer liberation. Contrary to Bronski's understanding, our discussions of sexual ethics are not an attempt to limit our liberation, but rather attempts to analyze our liberation in the context of our dealings with each other. Others of us are reworking scriptural readings of women and of sexuality, in a time when scriptural passages, read out of context, are so often used against us.

Because many Christians and other people of faith who gain media attention (given superior access to resources and a conservative bias to most media) are conservative, liberal, progressive, and radical Christians and other people of faith need to speak out, rather than let the conservative "spokespeople" represent us. We need to come together to work in coalition with others on the left, rather than letting the right divide us.

In order for the left to capture the political imagination, it needs to speak to people where they are. By opposing faith and queerness, we do a great disservice to queers among us, and alienate many people of faith who might otherwise be our allies. If the left is about creating communities of solidarity in which each individual looks beyond their "own" interests, we cannot afford to continue favoring a strategy which opposes our goals.

In Peace and Justice,

Judy Goldberger
Boston, MA

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Mother Mike & Bobbie Lee

Medicine from inside the Walls

by Amy Hoffman

When Mike Riegler, GCN's longtime office manager and prisoner project coordinator, died of AIDS on January 10, 1992, he had been corresponding with Bobbie Lee White in prison for over a dozen years. Bobbie is part-Native American, part-African American, an artist, a deeply spiritual and political person. Through his letters, he became close not only with Mike, but with others of Mike's friends and GCN colleagues. He made beautiful gifts for his friends out of fabric and beads, leather, and metal. Mike never took off a small leather medicine pouch on a beaded necklace and a wristband given to him by Bobbie Lee—I used to wonder if they showed up on his x-rays and if the doctors were confused by them—and he was cremated together with these things. In the letter below, Bobbie Lee describes how he made Mike a new medicine bag and wristband to help Mike when he was very sick with AIDS.

Mike received this letter when he arrived back at his Fenway apartment from a horrible ordeal in a Memphis, Tennessee hospital—a place he had never had any intention of going. He had been on his way to visit his old friend, former GCN news editor David Morris, in Austin, Texas, and had collapsed in the Memphis airport while changing planes. Knowing nothing about Mike and little about AIDS, the doctors there put him on a respirator for three days. He remained in the hospital for over a week after that trying to recover enough to fly back to Boston—the pressurized cabin put a terrible strain on his weakened heart and lungs. Bobbie Lee's gifts welcomed him home, and he read aloud the letter reprinted below which explains how they had been made in secret in the maximum security prison in Marion, Ohio, and what they signified, to several of us who were visiting him, amazed that he was finally with us, and Bobbie Lee, again. (Bobbie Lee has now been transferred out of Marion and has a much easier time getting the materials to create his beadwork and other crafts.)

The GCN Prisoner Project grew out of the paper's policy of running free classified ads and providing free subscriptions to lesbian and gay prisoners. As office manager, Mike was in charge of processing prisoner requests for these services. As he began to read the letters prisoners sent us, however, he realized there was much more that we could do. He began to do outreach: to inform inmates in prisons where no one received the paper that it was available. In this way, he greatly expanded the number of lesbian prisoners, in particular, on our list. He solicited articles, poems, and letters from prisoners that were published in GCN, informing readers about prison life and conditions. He developed information sheets to send to prisoners about legal, medical, and other questions. And, through letters, phone calls, and legal action, he advocated for prisoners who

Mike Riegler (l), Bobbie Lee White and the medicine bag



were being mistreated and denied their rights, letting prison administrators know that there were people on the outside monitoring what went on in their institutions. GCN participated in a lawsuit known as *NGTF v. Carlson*, which ultimately enabled inmates in federal prisons to receive lesbian and gay books and publications.

The most important part of the Prison Project, however, was probably Mike's personal correspondence. He wrote regularly to an amazing number of prisoners, offering friendship, encouragement, and advice. When he died, he was working on an anthology of letters from lesbian and gay prisoners, of which his correspondence with Bobbie Lee would have been a part.

Mike's work with prisoners was unique, and in the three years since his death no one has been able to take his place. Few individuals or organizations beyond immediate family and friends out in what Mike liked to call "minimum security" pay attention to what happens to those who are locked away, especially when they are gay, lesbian, bi, or transgender.

I have no doubt that if Mike had survived into these miserable times, when poor people are vilified as the cause of all social problems, and prisons cannot be built fast enough to contain them, even as this country has already imprisoned a larger proportion of its population than any other in the world, he would not have lost heart, but would have continued his support for lesbians and gay men behind bars. Although there's been much uproar from politicians on the right (and they all seem to be on the right these days) about avenging crime, no one is discussing the cruel and *usual* punishment that prisoners experience and what such punishment could possibly accomplish except to compound the bitterness, coldness, and rage that led to antisocial behavior in the first place. I hope these letters from Bobbie Lee White will remind readers of the people who suffer while politicians gesture and lie.

11/23/91

My Dear Mother Mike,

Surprise—Surprise—Surprise!

At last I'm done, many days and nights went into these sharing gifts (not to forget hard work—smile).

First off, I want to tell you a little about how they were made, then I'll tell you the meaning. As I have said before the prison only allows me to have seed beads, needle, thread (thankfully to you, I had beads to work with) and that's it as far as bead stuff goes. They don't let us have anything metal, such as scissors and such like. Tape, material, leather, cloth, etc., etc. So everything that I've made was made the hard way (smile). One thing this place makes you do is to become inventive. The material that I had to use came from a pair of workout pants and one of my red bandanas. (Of course I sent them to the laundry before using—big smile) And as far as the cutting goes, my keepers have a small pair of scissors that we are allowed to use, only when we come out for our one hour and 45 minutes recreation, and we have to use them right in front of them and of course there's bars between us and them (smile). I guess its because they think there will be a stabbing (sadly sometimes they're right). For the fine cutting, I had to use staples from magazines and such. I won't say how I put an edge on them (smile), but to be sure, the job took a lot of skin off my fingers (smile). So I guess the old saying is true, when there's a will, there is a way! You only have to believe that you can find a way (right). Thank goodness that we get things that have tape on them and if you are really careful in pulling it off, some of it is reuseable (smile). Enough of that, now for the meaning of the medicine items I sent. Onward!

In your package, you'll find (have already) 1 (one) medicine pouch, beaded with what I have come to know as your colors. The blue (sorry I didn't have any more light blue) and yellow around the flap stands for the sky and sun. The medicine wheel stands for the things that you already know about. The red—yellow—white—black stands for the 4 (four) winds (north=red, east=yellow, south=white, west=black). The brown stands for the earth! Inside your pouch you'll find a ball of sage, a braid of sweetgrass, also a tie of tobacco (the white ball), a flintstone, red—yellow—white—black pieces of square cloth (they're prayer ties). These items you can use as you will. The main item is a medicine wrist band. This one is yours, I made one for each of us, the designs are the same but the colors are not. This one has white that stands for clouds, the blue stands for you and the sky, the yellow stands for Rabbit-who-loves-the-Sky! and the sun, the red stands for your inner directions, the red and black also stand for me. The two diamonds of the design stand for the two spirits (two hearts) that you are a part of and always will be. The design in the center stands for the 4 (four) directions and the four powers of earth, water, air, and fire! This design I will nevermore make for anyone other than the great spirit (sky father)—the good spirits and the circle, I have said so—4 (four) times!

It is much like your bag, a lot of love, fasting, praying, etc., etc., has gone into your bag. Use it in times of need and times of joy. It is my hope that these medicine things will help you on this plane and when the time comes for you to walk the path of light.

Onward! There is only one more thing I must say about these gifts. You must try never to let them touch metal of any kind. But if that happens, as soon as you can pass the item over the smoke of either (or) sage, sweetgrass or cedar! Try to make sure that there is always something between the medicine items that is non-metal, if you have to set them down on metal (ok). Well that's about all that I can tell you about these medicine gifts (smile).

I send them with all my Love, hope strength of body and spirit!

I give these things wholeheartedly and freely, I say so four (4) times! In this world and the next!

Always a part of you,

Your friend and Sister/Brother!

Bobbie Lee

This is a letter of condolence that Bobbie Lee wrote to me after Mike died.

2/9/92

Dear friend Amy,

Yes I remember that letter I sent with the Red Bag. At the time that I sent it, I did not know that Mother had been hospitalized... I have heard from Carrie and Julie about the memorial ceremony. At the time that it was taking place, I fasted and held one also. Mother Mike is why, for the biggest part, I am what I am today. If I have love, it's because of Mother's love. If I have strength, it's because of Mother sharing his/hers with me when I had lost mine. I remember a time when I, my life, was a darkened cell and mother came to me holding the light called love & hope. If my life is now walking the good path, it is because mother gave me the light to see it. So as I go onward, I cannot help but share it with others that I meet in darkness. Amy I would like for you to know that you have been welcomed in Mother Mike's heart, and now you are welcomed in mine as well. With respect and friendship and love. I bid you welcome in this world and the next.

Always,

Bobbie Lee

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QueerWorld

Hasta la victoria...

MEXICO CITY—Contingents of lesbians and gay men are contributing to the ever more fearless protests here, as hundreds of thousands of Mexicans demand the resignation of President Zedillo and the complete withdrawal of troops from the Zapatista stronghold in the state of Chiapas. With what appears to be U.S. backing, Zedillo has been attempting to destroy the Zapatista campaign for economic and social justice, but his military strategy appears to have backfired.

In huge pro-Zapatista rallies last month, lesbians and gay men joined students and workers in displays of solidarity that included guerrilla theater and poetry—in addition to literally pissing on the palace. As one member of a gay contingent said, “We too have our human rights violated and the Zapatistas have always supported us.” Gay rights are included in the official Zapatista platform and supported in a communique from *subcomandante insurgente* Marcos.

Protesters, who are planning a massive caravan to take Chiapas back from the military, also attacked Zedillo for his imposition of austerity measures designed to bolster U.S. investors and guaranteed to dramatically worsen living conditions for most Mexicans. They called him a traitor for allowing increasing U.S. control over Mexican affairs. (Recent revelations include a memo from Chase Manhattan Bank, urging Zedillo to crush the Zapatistas and to rig future elections. According to *The Nation*, the Mexican press also reports that the CIA assisted in efforts to identify *subcomandante* Marcos.)

Lesbians Push for Inclusion in Beijing Conference

BEIJING—The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and other groups around the world are organizing for the inclusion of lesbian issues in the United Nations IV World Conference on Women. The conference is scheduled for September 1995 in Beijing.

Activists attending regional preparatory meetings can claim some success in raising lesbian concerns—including homophobic violence, child custody, immigration laws, and health care. Lesbian demands were included in the proposals submitted by non-governmental organizations at the Latin America and Caribbean preparatory meeting, with active support from many of the organizations. The Europe and North America Regional Platform for Action mentions sexual orientation in its preamble, and directs governments to include lesbian groups in the design, development, and implementation of strategies for change; this is the first time that a document adopted by Member States of the U.N. has included any mention of sexual orientation. These documents will be used in drafting the final version of the Platform for Action, which functions as an agenda on women's issues.

The final preparatory meeting will take place this month in New York.

Turkish Gay Man Wins Asylum in the U.S.

ARLINGTON, Virginia—A 22-year-old Turkish man here was granted asylum in the U.S. late last year on the grounds he would face danger as a gay man in Turkey. Serkan Altan is the second gay refugee to win asylum in the U.S. since Attorney General Janet Reno declared in June of 1994 that gay people are a “particular social group” persecuted in some nations.

Officials told Altan, who was raped by Turkish police for being gay, that “It has been determined you have established a well-founded fear of persecution were you to return to Turkey.”

Hets ‘pass’ to attend Australia’s Sleaze Balls

SYDNEY—This city’s famed annual gay Mardi Gras and Sleaze Ball parties have been “overrun” by fun-seeking heterosexuals, reported *Capital Q*. “With the increasing number of straights at our parties, they are becoming gay- and lesbian-unfriendly. That’s really sad,” said Edmund Milts, who is organizing a petition calling for male-only and female-only space at the events.

Mardi Gras organizers had previously tried to prioritize gay and lesbian participation by creating a membership organization. Applicants were quizzed about their sexuality, and only members were allowed to attend events. Apparently, however, more than a few straight people were willing to say they were queer to gain admittance.

Filipina Lesbians Protest Firings

MANILA—Women’s and lesbian groups here are demanding reinstatement of two lesbians fired from a human rights organization. Elizabeth Lim and Evangeline Castronuevo were terminated in the fall of last year when the Board of Directors of the Balay Rehabilitation Center learned that the two women were having an affair. The termination notices stated that the women were being dismissed for “acts grossly damaging to Balay.”

Lim and Castronuevo have filed a complaint alleging illegal dismissal with the National Labor Relations Commission and are seeking damages as well as reinstatement. The case has received enormous press attention, resulting in a new level of public debate about lesbian rights in the Philippines.

Yeltsin Vetoes HIV-Testing Law

MOSCOW—President Boris Yeltsin in late December vetoed legislation mandating HIV testing of all foreigners and tourists in Russia. The bill, which drew condemnation within the country as well as internationally, would have also allowed the government to create categories of Russian citizens subject to testing. Foreigners who tested HIV positive or who refused to be tested would have been deported. Russian citizens who refused to be tested could have been banned from various professions and denied medical treatment in general.

AIDS activists in Russia, who mobilized human

rights groups and health workers in opposition to the bill, warned that compulsory testing would consume 95 percent of the funds available for fighting AIDS. Russian tourism firms and their Western counterparts also protested.

Yeltsin sent the bill back to the Parliament for reworking.

62 Lesbian/Gay Canadians seek status for ‘foreign’ lovers

TORONTO—Sixty-two gay/lesbian Canadians have brought their “foreign” lovers to live here since the government’s 1993 decision that same-sex partners could be processed for landed-immigrant status on “humanitarian and compassionate grounds,” reported London’s *Capital Gay*. “Missions [consulates] should recognize that undue hardship would often result from separating or continuing separation of a bona fide same-sex or common-law couple.”

In another case, both members of a gay immigrant couple are applying for Canadian citizenship. Jose Luis Ortigoza, a Venezuelan gay man whose lover is a U.S. citizen, was granted asylum in Canada last month. Ortigoza testified that he had been raped and tortured by Venezuelan police. His U.S. lover, Carl Rizzo, now also plans to apply for Canadian citizenship.

El Salvador AIDS Activist Goes Underground

SAN SALVADOR—A leading AIDS activist here has been in hiding since November 5, 1994, after twice being threatened with death. In the first incident, two men stepped from a car, aimed a gun at “Wilfredo” and said, “If AIDS doesn’t kill the faggots, we will.” Hours later, the men again confronted Wilfredo, two blocks from his home, and promised to kill him unless he stopped his AIDS work and left the country within 30 days.

Wilfredo had been distributing condoms and AIDS leaflets in San Salvador’s poor neighborhoods for several months. He is affiliated with the U.S.-based Oscar Romero AIDS Project. Amnesty International is investigating the incidents, and the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission is calling on the Salvadoran government to protect the AIDS educator’s life.

Euro Commission Accepts Gay S/M Case

STRASBOURG, France—The European Commission on Human Rights last month accepted the case of three gay British men who were jailed for having consensual S/M sex. “The European Court has recognized that the individual in Britain has a right to privacy with respect to their sexual lives,” one of the men, Roland Jaggard, told Reuters. The arrests were part of British police’s notorious “Operation Spanner” in which 16 men were charged with assault in 1990 as a result of S/M sex play in their own homes. They were sentenced to up to four-and-a-half years in prison, although their terms were reduced on appeal.

continued on page 24

Reading Between The Lines: Race and Sexuality in Rightwing (and Gay) Campaigns

by Susan Hibbard

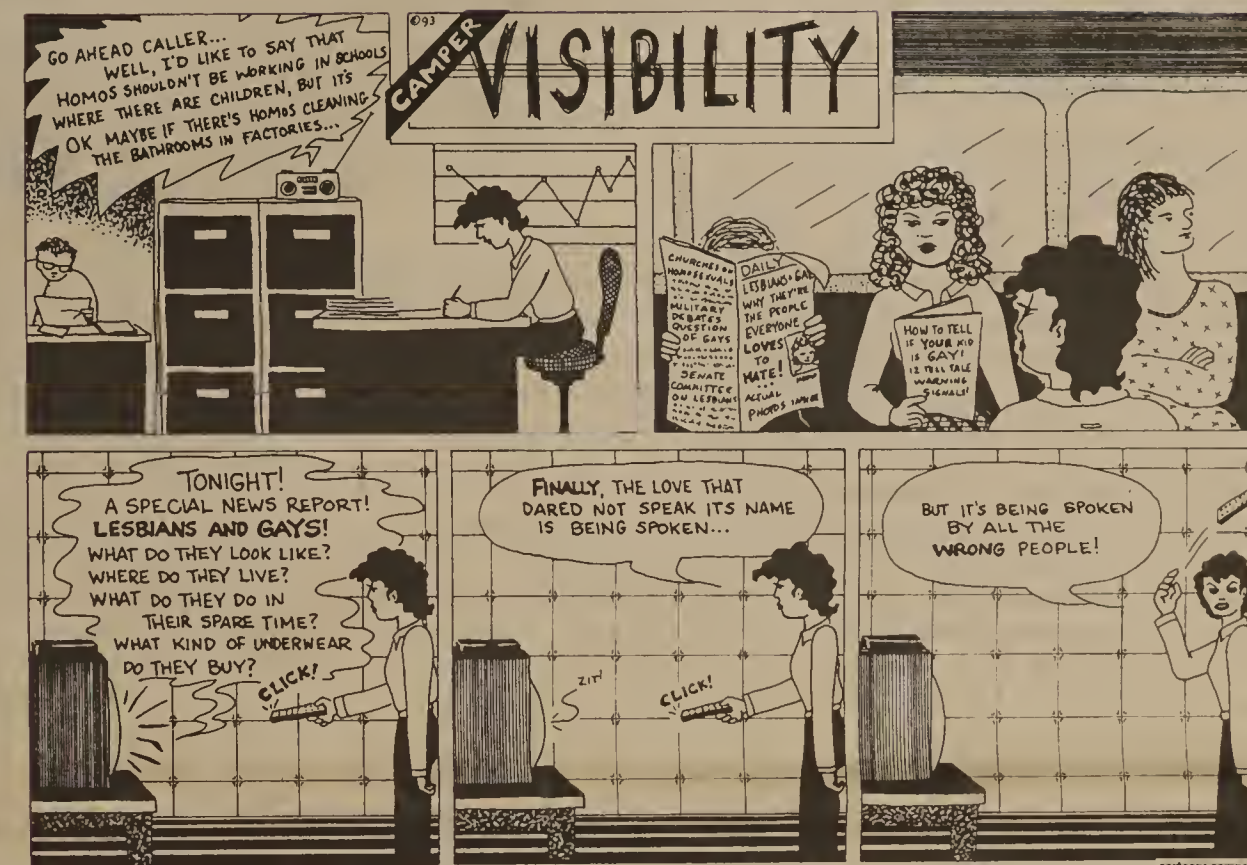
The Right is advancing its agenda for political and economic power by manipulating the most fundamental division in our society—the color line. Their rhetoric works to mobilize racism even when they claim to support “rights” for African Americans over and against gay people. In particular, the homophobic language of “special rights” has been used to agitate white people about the broad dangers of civil rights and minority status. The message is that the (white, heterosexual, and generous) majority must defend itself against many clamoring minorities who will attempt to receive protections that are unwarranted.

For the most part, lesbian and gay leaders have ignored the Right’s race conscious message in its anti-gay attacks. This failure has allowed our own defense campaigns to use rhetoric that also diminishes the meaning of civil rights. Gay messages—both intended and unintended—have supported the formulation of rights as a scarce commodity that must be rationed carefully to deserving victims and withheld from undeserving impostors.

Gay Rights, Special Rights

The Right’s video “Gay Rights, Special Rights” was produced by the Traditional Values Coalition and first used in Cincinnati to help win passage of an anti-gay initiative there. It represents one of the clearest examples of the Right’s framework for countering lesbian and gay acceptance, culture and rights. It also demonstrates that the Right has shifted from an open hate model toward one that showcases and simultaneously undermines 30 years of struggle for race and gender justice. Central to this updated model are the ways the Right solicits identification with “us” and defines “them,” the rightfully excluded.

The video opens with familiar footage of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from his August 28, 1963 “I Have A Dream” speech. The viewer hears Dr. King’s impassioned statement and hope that his “children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” The camera then cuts to Larry Kramer’s speech at the 1993 lesbian/gay March on Washington thirty years later. Kramer invokes Dr. King, claiming and transforming King’s words in an attempt to identify the gay movement with the Black Civil Rights Movement. The narration describes Kramer’s quote



transfiguration as a signifier of a larger gay attempt to hijack the 1964 Civil Rights Act, thereby making a mockery of legitimate civil rights claims and people who deserve these protections.

In addition, the Dr. King footage allows the Traditional Values Coalition to posit the notion that color(race)-blindness is not only good, but also that it is Dr. King’s dream. The video studiously avoids examining the arguments for race consciousness in our historical context, i.e. a context of racial division and systematic prejudice in which opportunities and privilege are apportioned along race lines.

The first 11 minutes of this 41-minute video feature significant segments in which African Americans rail against the attempt by gays to usurp their victories and nullify benefits for which African Americans had fought long and hard. The narrator and various Black speakers then move through a host of arguments about the differences between homosexuality and race or gender. These include the statements that homosexuals are not powerless, and that homosexuality is not an immutable characteristic but a behavior or form of conduct. The following quote from Emanuel McLittle, publisher of *Destiny* magazine, is one of many in which the Right states its perspective in the video: “If we give [homosexuals] special rights it opens Pandora’s box to every deviant behavior group logically...to line up and bang on the same door and insist on special rights for themselves. You have totally destroyed, really, a realistic understanding of human rights...[It will be] one further degradation of our great country. What is at stake is the future of America.”

These first 11 minutes might lead a viewer to assume that the intended audience is African Americans, but the next half hour reveals a second audience. In fact, African American spokespeople

never reappear in the video. Their purpose has been to authorize the notion of civil rights as both excluding queers and as an historical effort whose time has passed. The argument then proceeds to link homosexuality to undermining the family and the spread of disease. White narrators take over to articulate this racist line of attack, one that has been used historically against African Americans.

So, who is the “we” of “Gay Rights, Special Rights”? We are deserving, generous people who are trying to maintain values and family while surrounded by deviants, sickness, and aberration—those non-normal, non-assimilated types who actually revel in their own difference. We are the moral fiber and protectors of the future of a uniform, conforming America. And although we have been nothing if not well-intentioned, *we have gone too far*. We are those people who cannot allow others to line up and bang on the door. In this video, *we* are certainly not poor or needy. We are not single mothers or people living in non-traditional families. We are the productive white people who must act as gatekeepers if we are to survive.

Unfortunately, gay viewers of “Gay Rights, Special Rights” have frequently adopted a literal reading of the video’s first 11 minutes—one that accepts the video’s white gay/African American straight (and homophobic) dichotomy. This reading blocks larger rubrics under which gay might fall, such as gay as Black, gay as different, gay as discriminated against. It also means accepting the dangerous premise that the Right is effectively organizing support for its anti-gay agenda within African American communities.

To a significant extent, elements of this surface reading have become political common sense, even among progressives. This was evident in a recent

An Oregon Yes on 13 Campaign Committee broadside. October '94

continued from previous page

evaluation of New York State's Attorney General race, where Karen Burstein, an out lesbian, lost the election. While reviewing vote results and exit polling data county by county, broken down by age, income, race, and gender, several people, at a largely white meeting of women's groups, indicated the desperate need to work against homophobia in communities of color. "The Right is reaching out...We must also..." Never eager to deter activists from reaching out, I nevertheless found myself dizzy with anger and confusion. How was this desire to "reach out" related to the voting data? African Americans were the community and the identified category of voters who most consistently voted for Karen Burstein, the lesbian, Jewish, Democratic candidate. More than women, more than young voters, more than any income category—and way, way more than whites—African Americans were loyal to the Democratic party, and deserted the Democratic ticket the least. Here, clearly, an assumption of greater homophobia in African American communities than in white communities blocked accurate and honest readings of the data.

Sound bites: analyzing our gay messages

To an alarming extent, TV messages used in the defense campaigns against anti-gay initiatives in Colorado, Oregon, and Idaho have reinforced demeaned notions of minority status and civil rights. The rhetoric we use in this electoral arena deserves particular attention because gay communities currently spend large quantities of money in such campaigns. Increasingly, we are using mass communication sound-bites to communicate our identities and goals. Even though these campaigns have severe limitations, their messages reach a broader population than can be reached in other types of organizing, and often set the terms of debate for audiences in grassroots and other non-electoral environments.

Messages delivered in gay efforts to defend against the Right conform to basic rules of statewide campaigns. Traditionally, such campaigns are million dollar or often multi-million dollar operations that form, work and shut down in approximately half a year. They are a study in controlled chaos in which messages are delivered to hundreds of thousands of voters over and over again. The theory, also a basic premise of advertising, is that only multiple contacts will have any impact and that television is one of the most effective ways to deliver the messages.

Campaign messages are usually basic statements about self-identity, the opposition's identity, and exclusion. Campaign messages answer the questions: "What will we say about ourselves? And, what will we say about them?" Not only has campaign method evolved to a message condensation where 60 seconds is long, but the structure of campaign messages is also one of definition by contrast, an identity dichotomy. In other words, "us" and "them."

In combatting the Right at the ballot box, gay leaders have adopted the sound-bite, "us"-and-"them" structure of campaign messages. This alone might be troubling, but here I want to focus on the worrisome contents of the sound-bites themselves, which seem to reveal gay leaders' acceptance of the opposition's limited notion of rights. For example, in 1994, Oregon's pro-gay "No on 13" campaign used the slogan: "Defend everyone's basic rights." What can be read into this slogan is that there are some rights that are basic—rights that everyone has, and then there are other rights that are not basic that need to be parceled out carefully. This notion of basic and implicitly non-basic rights may have supported the idea that there are "special rights" and that perhaps "we" have gone too far in granting them.

In fact, the message used in the "No on 13" campaign begs the question of whether we won—in part, at least—because we found a language that tapped into the majority's support of a limited notion of fairness. A language that did not confront issues of the meaning of minority status, anti-discrimination, or civil rights. At the same time, the "No on 13" slogan is less conservative than most. It represents a carefully crafted attempt to appeal to the "public's" sense of fairness while avoiding the pitfalls of calling for "the right to privacy" or "an end to government interference."

If public opinion polling alone dictated campaign messages, consultants might argue that campaign messages fighting anti-gay measures should appeal to the "likely" voter's respect for privacy. "Sex is a private matter that should be removed from the political arena." Such a message, however, would be self-defeating; it would undermine the gay community's most effective education tool—coming out. It would also bolster a conservative and limited concept of

Ballot Measure 13 Special Edition: Please Read and Pass Along HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE SCHOOLS

Beaverton teacher tells boys to try homosexuality "at least twice."

Fifth grade students accuse Larry Smith of pushing homosexuality and condoms after showing a film called "State Roles and Tight Buns."

Beaverton, Ore. (The Oregonian) — A fifth grade teacher in Beaverton, Ore., has been accused of pushing homosexuality and condoms on his students after showing a film called "State Roles and Tight Buns." The film, which was shown to a class of 25 boys, was described by the students as "a bunch of lies" and "a bunch of crap." The teacher, Larry Smith, was accused of telling the boys that they should "try homosexuality at least twice." The students also accused Smith of showing them a condom and telling them to "use it."

Head Start adds "gay" curriculum for Cottage Grove pre-schoolers

"Heather Has Two Mommies" and "Daddy's Rainbow" are story-line reading list

Cottage Grove, Ore. (The Oregonian) — A local Head Start program added seven "children's" books devoted to promoting homosexuality. It was all part of a system-wide "anti-bias" curriculum which also includes guidelines on how to encourage acceptance from minority parents. "We're trying to make sure that we're not just teaching about the 'other' but also about the 'normal,'" said the program director. The books, which are part of a curriculum called "Heather Has Two Mommies" and "Daddy's Rainbow," are designed to help children understand and accept differences.

Stop homosexual promotion in the schools -- vote YES on Measure 13

...[C]onsultants might argue that campaign messages fighting anti-gay discriminatory measures should appeal to the "likely" voter's respect for privacy. ...But such a message would be self-defeating; it would undermine the gay community's most effective education tool — coming out.

government, paradoxically a view of government that couldn't establish anti-discrimination regulations, and it would support an ever expanding "privatization" of existence.

In Idaho, opponents of the state's anti-gay initiative found themselves in the unenviable position of identifying "Too Much Government" as the most effective campaign message. Yet, while standing for "no government interference" helped defeat the Idaho measure, it did not help the national debate about the role of the state. Where would we be without government intervention on issues like slavery, segregation, affirmative action, not to mention OSHA, school lunch programs, public broadcasting, the NEA, etc.? Wasn't "Too Much Government" the argument that defeated health care reform, spearheaded by the greedy (private) insurance industry?

Two other messages that call for examination were produced in 1992 by the pro-gay campaign organization, Equal Protection of Colorado. They are: "Don't Legalize Discrimination" and "A Job is not a Special Right." The first message allows for the interpretation that discrimination against gays is now illegal. If that were true, gays would not need to fight for protections unless they did, in fact, want something extra. The second leaves unchallenged the notion that the Right's concept of "special rights" exists. These arguments do not clarify political reality, i.e. that discrimination *does* exist, that in many instances discrimination is legal, and that existing civil rights protections are not an elevated status but a meager remedy for the common practice of wrongs. By supporting (even if inadvertently) the notion that some rights are special, gay leaders may be lending support to notions of reverse discrimination—that it is the "normal," "moral" person who is most likely to be discriminated against today.

Check Your Message

The least we can demand of justice-seeking organizing is that it do no harm. This means that we must confront the interconnections between racist and homophobic thought and how homophobia is organized by racist revisions of the 1960s civil rights agenda. Specifically, we need to find ways to challenge the concept of "special rights" that simultaneously reject inferences that minority status is a privileged state. We need to challenge the interpretation of civil rights as a demeaning helping hand and reassert the role that struggle has played in making change.

Queers are not alone in our trouble developing and articulating messages that are effective and not harmful—let alone messages that help build long-term support. Immigrants and immigrants' rights activists faced similar challenges in mass communication to voters in California on Proposition 187. What can immigrants' rights advocates say when confronted with voter research polling that demonstrates a public lack of compassion and a pervasive equation of immigrants with criminals? Should an anti-187 campaign argue that crime will increase if immigrant children are forced out of California's schools? And what will we say to battle the upcoming fight to repeal affirmative action in California, or nationwide?

Lesbian and gay leaders and organizational spokespeople have, perhaps understandably, sought to put the best spin on the 1994 election results. We defeated anti-gay ballot measures in Oregon and Idaho; every openly gay incumbent elected official was re-elected; and eleven new out lesbians and gay men were elected to various offices, including the state legislatures in Arizona, Missouri, and California. But a quick look at Tuesday, November 8, 1994 shows us that 187 was overwhelmingly passed, prison-slavery (mandatory work without wages for private and public industry) was enacted in Oregon, a contract was taken out on all non-Americans, poor Americans, young people, women, and people of color. If we did well, who are we?

Susan Hibbard is a campaign consultant.

Whose American History?

by Barbara Smith

The racist assault on people of color is the underlying motivation of almost every policy or legislative initiative now being debated at the federal and state levels. This is hardly new, but the rapid escalation of these attacks signals an urgency. The destruction of the welfare system, the redefining of civil rights as special rights, the anti-immigrant momentum, the reinstatement of the death penalty and efforts to criminalize the masses of people of color are a few examples of organizing the pervasive racism in US society to dismantle the gains made by the social movement of the last forty years. As the Right takes the initiative and moderates, and even liberals, defer to their mean-spirited agenda, those of us from the left and progressive movements need to evaluate and frame our organizing and analysis in the context of these political realities. In light of this task I examine here two recently published books, Sarah Schulman's *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life during the Reagan/Bush Years* (Routledge, 1994) and Mab Segrest's *Memoir of a Race Traitor* (South End Press, 1994), to discuss what they mean politically in these very troubled times. My concern is to identify what in our history of political organizing helps us meet the current challenge.

Two Histories, Two Perspectives

Let me say at the outset that I have been friends with Mab Segrest since the 1970s and have a great deal of respect for her. I do not know Sarah Schulman and have read little of her previous work. In 1993, however, I had a troubling encounter with the Lesbian Avengers (the group that Schulman co-founded) when they attempted to stage a "Freedom Ride" to Albany, New York. Schulman's account of this incident appears in her book and I describe my own experience of the event later in this review.

On the surface Schulman's and Segrest's books have several things in common. Both women are white and Lesbian. (Schulman is Jewish and Segrest was raised as a Christian.) Both have had political experience in the feminist movement, and their books cover roughly the same period.

Despite these potential commonalities, *My American History* and *Memoir of a Race Traitor* are profoundly different works. Although Schulman uses the term "history" in the title, her book is largely a compilation of short journalistic pieces, arranged chronologically and written originally for women's or gay publications. She follows most of the articles with a commentary that updates or elaborates upon the subject, but which also often undercuts what she has written in the original article.

Segrest's work is a series of essays which combine reporting, autobiographical writing, and political analysis. Together, they compose a unified memoir about her experience doing anti-racist organizing as an out Lesbian in North Carolina. Because of her detailed recounting of significant events and extensive documentation, *Memoir of a Race Traitor* actually provides a useful history of the fight against white supremacy in one state during the 1980s.

History is not simply chronology. It is the ordering and interpretation of events in the past in order to come to some understanding about them in the present. Schulman's episodic approach does not provide such understanding, because of the original purposes for which these separate articles were written and also because she does not provide a consistent analytical framework with which to comprehend the events she describes.

Each author's voice is also distinctive. Segrest's is self-revealing, amazingly

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The Lesbian and Gay Past: An Interpretive Battleground

by Polly Thistlethwaite

Mainstream research institutions are currently courting lesbian and gay collections at an unprecedented rate to bolster sorely lacking holdings. This recent academic interest in lesbian and gay archival material is a result of both the success and the defeat of grassroots archives. Our success is that a liberal mainstream now "gets it" that lesbian and gay people have been assaulted by historical record, and some institutions are attempting to remedy this at long last by adopting folded grassroots collections or affiliating with active ones. But assimilation of grassroots archives threatens to undermine what little hard won control community-based institutions have over the construction of lesbian and gay histories. If all lesbian and gay archives were folded into the mainstream, we would turn over control of our history and memory to a system still structured to work against us.

With few exceptions, academic archives today continue to code lesbian and gay collections, and to discount the self-documenting efforts of lesbians and gays in constructing an uncloseted history. "There have always been moments of archival heroism in mainstream settings," said Deborah Edel, co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. "But these are individual acts set against a backdrop of institutional hostility." Newly interested in lesbian and gay archival material, mainstream cultural institutions are positioned to appropriate the ownership, the presentation, and the very nature of lesbian and gay history. As colonized people deeply invested in the integrity and utility of our histories, we face a different struggle than we did a generation ago.

"We insisted on autonomy from the university," said Degania Golove of the June L. Mazer Lesbian Collection describing their recent agreement to move to rent-free space on the University of Southern California campus. "We didn't want to give the collection over to USC. But if we can get more volunteers and save money out of this, then it's good for us," Golove said. USC announced in January that the Los Angeles-based collections of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives and the One Institute were coming to campus, with the two mostly-male collections merging into One. Both One and Mazer will continue to govern and staff themselves, raising money for independent housing during this rent-free opportunity.

Grassroots lesbian and gay archivists display ample suspicion about merging with mainstream institutions. And with good reason. Nothing less than the integrity and control of our collective memory is at stake. Negotiations for a merger or partnership between the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) and the community-based Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California (GLHS) have been underway for over two years. At the heart of the negotiations are concerns about the collection's future integrity and accessibility. "San Francisco currently has a queer-friendly climate, which extends to city government and to the administration of San Francisco Public," said Bill Walker of the GLHS. "As an historically conscious organization, however, we are not willing to gamble on the

long-term kindness of strangers." Walker said GLHS is determined to obtain a contract with SFPL that insures the safety of the collections entrusted to them.

In classic appropriation of the margins by the center, mainstream institutions, spared the risk and labor of naming, claiming and collecting lesbian and gay lives, now embrace the product of alternative institutions. It is less risky and less work for a university to absorb or to affiliate with an established community-based gay or lesbian archive than to create their own. At the core of Cornell's Human Sexuality Collection is the Mariposa Education and Research Foundation collection; the International Gay Information Center collection comprises the bulk of gay material at the New York Public Library, and the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance recently offered their sizable lesbian periodical collection to Duke University. Yale, Brown, UCLA, and Columbia, among others have announced an intent to acquire lesbian and gay archival material, building their collections from scratch.

Just look under 'Sexual Perversion'

Even with academics supporting the new queer studies classes, American libraries and archives still on the whole fail to acquire and adequately identify lesbian and gay material. Libraries and archives have encumbered access to gay and lesbian material, turning the quest for self-discovery into an exercise in frustration and humiliation. Gays and lesbians have not been alone in confronting classification deficiencies, but we are saddled with unique brands of invisibility, homogeneity, and degradation reflected in Library of Congress subject headings. The word "gay," for example, in widespread use since the 1920s, was only sanctioned as a heading in 1987. Until 1972, libraries continued to refer readers from "Homosexuality" or "Lesbianism" to "Sexual perversion." Most larger libraries have not converted or linked their old subject headings to the new ones, so even today to find books acquired before 1987 you have to use some form of "Homosexual," "Sexual perversion," or another word used by local catalogers at the time.

Subject headings freshly applied today are still scarce and inexact, foiling subject and keyword searches in library computer catalogs. "Gays" is

used as an umbrella term instead of "Lesbians and Gays," for example. Headings do not exist for "Butch-Fem," "Transgender," or "Queer." There are no headings for "American Literature—lesbian authors" or "American Literature—gay authors" equivalent to "American literature—Asian American authors" or "American literature—women authors."

"Queer materials often stay in the backlogs long after less 'problematic' items have been processed. Perhaps the subject headings are too difficult to assign properly," remarked Marvin Taylor, a librarian at New York University. "Queer materials go beyond pointing out the problems of these library procedures—they question the structure of knowledge on which the procedures are based. In response, these materials are the most closeted of all."

Even in the presence of explicit archival evidence, mainstream archivists often decide not to use the rudimentary lesbian or gay subject headings available. The Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, one of the leading women's archives in the United States, will not assign a lesbian subject heading to a collection unless it belongs to a self-identified, unavoidable lesbian. Adrienne Rich and Charlotte Bunch have Schlesinger collections bearing explicit subject headings, but Eleanor Coit and Pauli Murray do not. The Murray collection is assigned the subject headings "women—sexual behavior" and "friendship." The Schlesinger habitually employs the "friendship" and "single women" headings to code lesbian materials.

A woman who was actually doing research on friendship between women, told Susan von Salis of the Schlesinger Library, "You know, it's curious, all these collections that are supposed to be about friendship seem to be about lesbians."

The Schlesinger's omissions and euphemisms are attributed to uncertainty about a woman's sexuality and the Schlesinger's opposition to "outing" lesbians, be they dead or alive. The practice also speaks to a fear of offending family members or funding sources (often one in the same) and the interpretive "risk" the Schlesinger is unwilling to take to offer us a history on our terms. Instead, the Schlesinger leaves us a veiled, closeted history—a silent inheritance little changed from the pre-Stonewall era. To date, only 85 out of over 410,000 records on the Research Library Information Network's archival database (the database of the largest American academic libraries) contain some form of "lesbian" as a subject word. The traditions of archival cloaking and exclusion are at the root of gay and lesbian invisibility in the historical record.

The lesbian and gay past continues to be an interpretive battleground that mainstream archives have largely refused to enter. At the same time, though, libraries offer up worlds to those who work hard enough to unearth the secrets there.

Out in the Mainstream

As self-discovering, self-documenting people, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people have mined a history from mainstream settings where it has lingered, camouflaged and neglected. The Lesbian Herstory Archives' found image collection, for example, contains several photos discovered

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ABOUT THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES

The Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation, popularly known as the Lesbian Herstory Archives, opened in 1974 in the pantry of Joan Nestle's New York City apartment. Joan and co-founder Deborah Edel along with the other collective members formed the organization in response to the failure of mainstream archives to collect and value lesbian culture. It is a principle of the Archives never to turn the collection over to a mainstream institution.

The LHA is home to the world's largest collection of lesbian material. Thousands of lesbians have donated personal collections of letters, diaries, and photographs to LHA; others have contributed clippings for LHA's subject files, donated unpublished writings and school papers, or offered lesbian artifacts such as t-shirts, buttons, art objects, taped television shows, and oral histories.

LHA is an all volunteer, community-based, lesbian operated grassroots archive inviting every lesbian to help build the collection. We believe that every woman who has had the courage to touch another woman deserves to be remembered and that the self-documented lives of famous, infamous, and not-so-famous lesbians will enrich understandings for generations to come. All lesbians are invited to visit and to contribute.

In June 1993, after several years of a massive grassroots fund raising effort, the Lesbian Herstory Archives re-opened in a new home in Brooklyn's Park Slope. The archive is open to visitors and researchers by appointment. Volunteers work most Thursday evenings & other scheduled weekend days.

**To make a donation, arrange a visit,
or find out more, contact:**

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Clockwise from upper left:

Lesbian Herstory Archives contingent in New York City's Lesbian and Gay Pride March, 1980 (photo: Morgan Gwenwald)

The Lesbian Herstory Archives' limestone townhouse in Brooklyn's Park Slope is the only building in New York City ever to be owned by a lesbian organization. There is currently less than \$70,000 left on the commercial mortgage the organization hopes to pay off this year.

Both other images are from the Lesbian Herstory Archives Found Image Collection, originally from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

A Clear Pattern of Neglect: Prisons and the HIV Crisis

by Trevor Hope and Peggy Hayes

The prison AIDS crisis is an extremely complex political issue. The extent of the crisis is revealed in the following ratios. The rate of HIV seroprevalence in prisons across the US is at least fourteen times higher than among non-incarcerated populations. Rates of HIV infection in Black and Latino prisoners are routinely much higher than in white prisoners (e.g. prisoners in Massachusetts classified as "Hispanic" have a seropositive rate more than twice that of white prisoners). The percentage of women prisoners with HIV is twice that of men and, according to at least one report, prisoners with AIDS become sick at twice the speed of those on the outside.

Explanations for these rates of HIV infection in prisons are both obvious and complex. Prisoners with AIDS do not receive adequate health care. They are unable to protect themselves and others from HIV and its effects, and have little access to education. The US criminal "justice" system functions as an instrument of racism. The so-called war on drugs has in fact been a war on drug users and a means of criminalizing whole communities. Prison expansion will accommodate mainly men of color, incarcerated for drug-related crimes, often minor infractions. Women who are at greatest risk for HIV are significantly overrepresented in prisons: women of color, poor women and women who are injection drug users. They are treated inequitably in sentencing and receive worse treatment in prison; as always they must constantly assert their right to adequate and appropriate health care. The dangerous escalation of unthinking "law and order" rhetoric for populist political purposes fuels a view of prisoners as beyond rehabilitation, as expendable.

As long as addicts are scapegoated, homophobia is the norm, and prisoners are degraded, the prison AIDS crisis will continue to blaze its trail of destruction through—and beyond—prisons.

The Effects of Privatizing Prison Health Care

As members of ACT UP Boston we have been involved in advocating for prisoners with AIDS in Massachusetts. Our group responded to appeals from prisoners who are working on the inside to provide education and support for one another. What we encountered in the prison was the devastating effects of Governor Weld's heralded approach to state government: the unprecedented privatization of the entire state's correctional health care within a single managed system. In place since January 1992, this privatized system has resulted in a severe decline in the standard of care available. Prisoners have less and less access to specialists and medication supplies; providers do not follow recommended courses of treatment; health-maintenance and monitoring measures and counseling have often been unavailable.

In the absence of adequate oversight mechanisms, the logic of privatization has meant that the Department of Corrections and the private medical provider cut costs and inflate profits at the expense of standards of care. Many primary care staff have no competence in or concern for HIV disease. Those health care workers with a dedication to providing quality services to prisoners have reported

frustration at the limitation of clinic hours and the unreliability of records and communication.

There has been occasional scrutiny of the system, prompted by tragedies such as the death of three women prisoners—two of them AIDS-related—in, or very shortly after release from, Framingham Prison. Spearheaded by Representative Barbara Gray, a Special Legislative Committee commissioned a report on the circumstances surrounding the death of one of these women, Robin Peeler. The report was compiled by three independent physicians who found "a clear pattern of neglect, inattention and inappropriate cost containment measures" on the part of the contracted provider,

Dying with Dignity

Despite these changes, it is clear that the system will continue to fail when confronted with the realities of rising seroconversion rates among prisoners. This past year a Medical Parole Bill, carefully formulated by a coalition of advocates and guided by input from prisoners, was presented to the State Legislature. It was intended to ensure that people could find some dignity in the final stages of their illness. The bill specified that since the prisoners no longer represented a danger to society, they need not die separated from their friends and families in hostile and uncomfortable surroundings. This bill was first drastically amended by the House of

What we encountered in the prison was the devastating effects of Governor Weld's heralded approach to state government: the unprecedented privatization of the entire state's correctional health care within a single managed system. In place since January 1992, this privatized system has resulted in a severe decline in the standard of care available.

Emergency Medical Service Associates (EMSA), as well as previous providers.

When such attention is directed at the prison system, some basic improvements are made; but without adequate structural mechanisms for oversight, there is little chance of this translating into reliable standards of care for all prisoners. After a further legislative hearing and under pressure from prisoners' and PWA advocacy groups, including demonstrations by ACT UP, Thomas Rapone, the Secretary for Public Safety, appointed his own AIDS Task Force. While the Task Force began meeting in January 1993, it was not until eighteen months later that they issued their recommendations. EMSA was replaced and the Department of Corrections was directed to introduce a case-management system with the aim of ensuring improved communication.

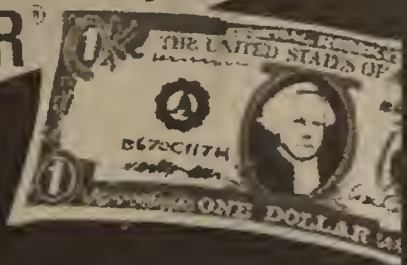
Representatives and then vetoed by the Governor. As in many other states, existing mechanisms that should allow the compassionate release of terminally ill prisoners have routinely been denied to prisoners dying of AIDS.

AIDS Education and Prevention

After more than a decade of the AIDS crisis, Massachusetts still lacks any policy on prison AIDS education. There have been peer-led education and support projects for a number of years in some of the prisons. Peer education groups are the most effective means of promoting culturally sensitive education to prisoners, and yet these groups report that prison authorities obstruct their efforts. Additionally they receive no support from the Department of Corrections. This again reflects a

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widespread trend. Inmate advocates from across the US routinely report that attempts to inform and empower fellow prisoners result in often repeated, punitive transfers. The widespread failure of prison systems to support HIV education projects by and for prisoners indicates not only a lack of care for the well-being of prisoners, but also for the communities into which many of them will return, and in which they could potentially act as important resources for AIDS awareness.

Although the National Commission on AIDS urged in 1991 that AIDS prevention in prisons should include distributing the means of protection against HIV transmission, protective methods such as latex condoms, dental dams and bleach kits for cleaning works are actively prohibited in most prison systems. While security issues are cited as the reason for such prohibition, the National Commission's report concluded that the availability of protective methods has never been associated with a security problem. Prison authorities claim sex and other risky activities are not permitted but, in their willful denial, they sanction transmission of HIV between prisoners. Corrections officials prefer to act shocked at the suggestion that they should acknowledge the reality of sex in prisons despite the fact that there is growing public concern over the extent of prison rape. A *Boston Globe* poll, earlier this year, found that 73 percent of Massachusetts residents favored the controlled distribution of condoms in the state system.

Entering Clinical Trials

One area in which change is slowly occurring is prisoner participation in clinical trials. During the

second half of the twentieth century there has been widespread and justified concern over the misuse of prisoners as involuntary test subjects in medical experiments. In response, many states sought to protect prisoners by placing bans on their participation in clinical trials. This policy has been slowly reversing since clinical trials have functioned in the AIDS crisis as an important, sometimes the only, source of treatment. Following decisions in other states, the Department of Corrections in Massachusetts decided in September 1993 to permit prisoners access to HIV related clinical trials. According to federal restrictions, prisoners may neither be offered special inducements to participate, nor be allowed to enroll in trials where they could receive placebos. Since clinical trials almost certainly offer the possibility of increased medical attention from staff outside the correctional system, many prisoners are likely to find this an inducement and benefit.

The effect of this change in policy should not be overestimated, however, since prisoners will only benefit from clinical trials where they have access to very current information and where prison medical staff have research interests and expertise. While it now seems to be a principle that prisoners should have access to the same range of treatment options as those on the outside, the practical limitations of this access, and the inequities of clinical trials themselves need to be taken into account: e.g., the failure to enroll women, the invasive and discriminatory regulation of contraceptive practice sometimes required for participation, the failure of clinical trials in general to enroll people of color, the lack of clinical trials designed to provide specific informa-

tion about women and HIV, the restrictions of trials on the basis of T-cell counts, and the threat of being dropped from a trial (and hence having medication stopped) if another condition arises. Such inequities might be perpetuated when prisoners are permitted to participate.

Building Coalitions/Breaking Isolation

The neglect of prisoners has depended on their relative isolation. Thus coalition building between prisoner activism and activism on the outside is crucial to effecting change. Where community groups and AIDS service organizations are present in prisons and available to support prison AIDS activists and educators, they function not only as a source of information but, potentially, as representatives who can oversee and help determine the policies of a particular institution.

Coalitions between prisoners and direct action groups such as ACT UP (which often include former prisoners) have generated public attention to and outrage at the treatment of prisoners with HIV disease. In Wisconsin, for example, prisoners rallied at the same time as ACT UP held actions and a press conference. But prisons authorities have the upper hand in determining the strategies these coalitions can implement. Maintaining effective communication is made difficult when HIV educational materials are confiscated or returned in the mail. When considering an action at a particular prison, activists need to ask whether retribution upon prisoners may follow in the form of lockdowns and other punitive measures.

The politicization of prison health care and the cruel neglect of prisoners' well-being did not begin

continued on page 24

Fairies and Normals and Queers, Oh My!

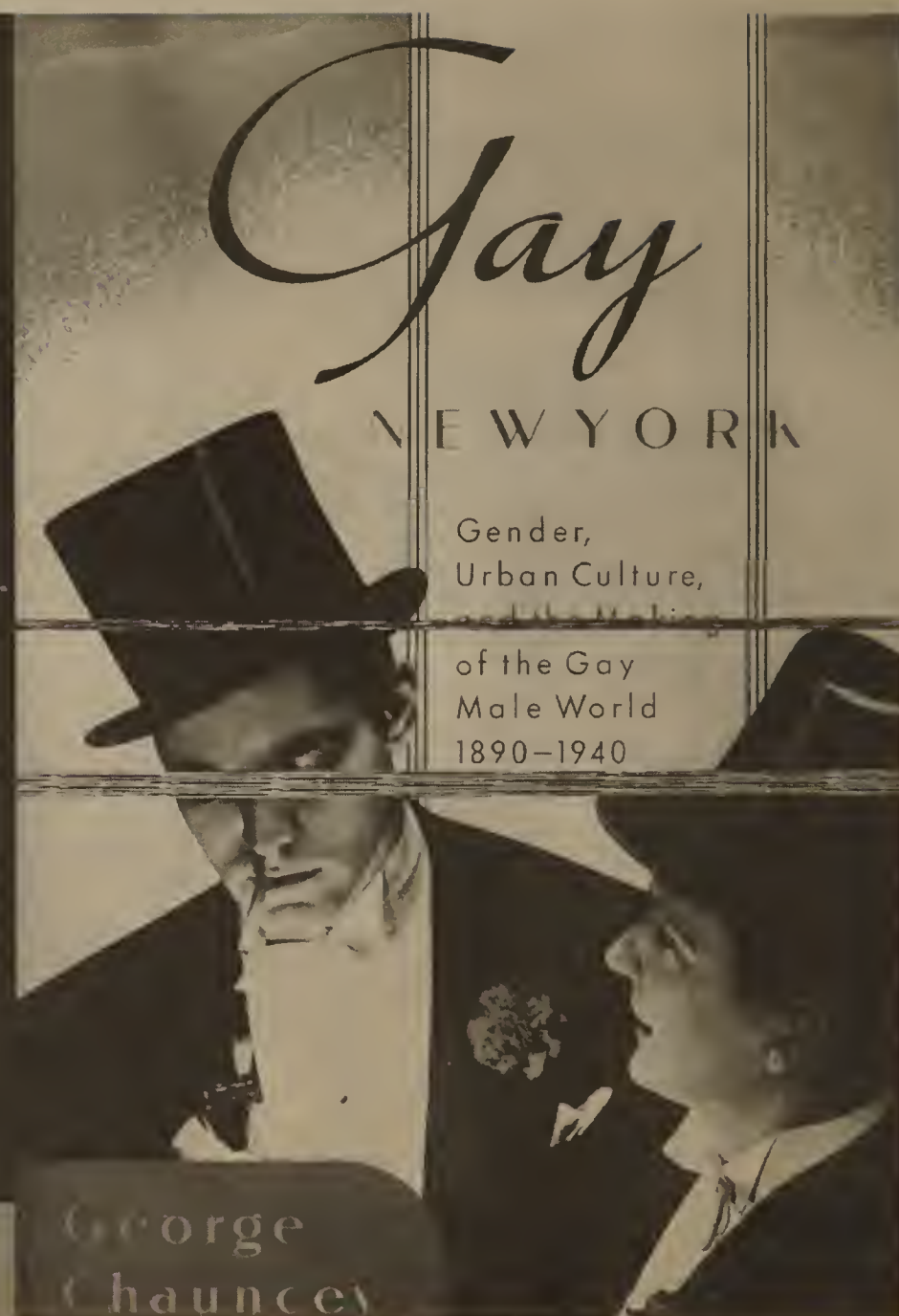
Inventing Cultures, Identities and the Closet

Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940

by George Chauncey

Basic Books, New York, 1994

Reviewed by Ann Holder



In *Gay New York*, historian George Chauncey uncovers a “gay world (that) is not supposed to have existed... a distinctive culture with its own language and customs, its own traditions and folk histories, its own heroes and heroines.” From the late 1890s through the mid 1930s, this vibrant subculture existed alongside “normal” New Yorkers, sometimes visible to “straights” and sometimes not. Daily encounters on the streets, in restaurants, cafeterias, saloons, parks and theaters made every conceivable public space also a potentially “gay” space. In those spaces, men self-identified as “queer” developed a set of social networks that provided sexual partners but also best friends, roommates, apartments, jobs, outings, intimacy and community. Chauncey, a meticulous researcher and a careful interpreter, seeks to “restore that world to history, to chart its geography, and to recapture its culture and politics.”

The Hetero/Homo Divide: A Recent Invention

Chauncey also examines the world that existed “before the hetero-homosexual binarism was consolidated... before, that is, the decline of the fairy and the rise of the closet” in the late forties. He notes that the most visible gay presence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was located in the working class Italian, Irish and African-American neighborhoods of New York. Homosexual practices in those neighborhoods appear in very different forms than in middle-class culture but Chauncey argues that rather than excluding these men from inquiry, as is commonly done, it is necessary to “redefine the very boundaries of the inquiry.” In fact, his willingness to consider these subjects significantly impacts the directions of his narrative.

In reconstructing the “gay world” (I use quotes to express my reservations), Chauncey found large numbers of men who participated in sexual encounters

with other men, who were nonetheless defined by themselves, and by their communities, as “normal men.” Through his discussion of fairies, queer men and normal men, he noted how positioning in a sexual encounter (e.g. active/passive) could connote quite different relations to masculinity and how these shifts were tied to particular class, racial and ethnic backgrounds. Particularly within the working class culture of the Bowery, sexual practices and the choice of sexual objects were less crucial to the establishment of “manhood” than the ability to appear aggressive, dominant and physically assertive.

This careful reconstruction results in one of the most striking arguments of the book: that the homo-heterosexual divide, a binarism that currently seems so fixed and permanent, was a “stunningly recent creation.” While the notion of sexual deviancy existed at the turn of the century, what defined and constituted the boundary between the normal and the deviant was particular to that era. Even then, “normal people” maintained their identities as normal by “eschewing anything that might mark them as ‘queer.’” Interestingly, the participation in homosexual practices was not necessarily defined as queer. “Normal” men were free to engage in unlimited sexual encounters with other men without endangering their status or privilege, as long as they played (or claimed to play) the active role and presented themselves to the world as manly men. These relationships, between effeminate men and normal men are not exclusively a nineteenth century phenomenon. In cultural settings where homosexuality is unrecognized as a social identity or deeply stigmatized, there still exists the possibility of sexual encounters between men that involve little risk to the status or privilege of the man taking the “active” role, and that censor the “passive” man on the basis of his “femininity” rather than an identification with homosexuality. The patterns of the AIDS crisis in the US have publicly revealed large networks of men for whom homosexuality is not a primary or even partial category of identity, who nonetheless, have sex with other men.

Chauncey’s book, though specific to a particular historical moment is provocative in this regard. His suggestive conclusions about the nineteenth and early twentieth century indicate that the hetero/homo divide was always much more permeable than the dominant discourse on sexual (or racial) identity would suggest. This raises the disturbing political questions about who is served by such a divide? In what ways does adherence to identity based distinctions actually limit or inhibit the political movement for gay and lesbian liberation?

Chauncey’s research implicitly challenges the prior focus of gay history on the emergence of the modern homosexual subject, constructed as a product of the elite classes, white, at least middle if not upper class. He also disputes the view of

gay history as a narrative of progress, from isolation and invisibility toward greater freedom and public recognition. He points to the existence of multiple cultures and communities constituting the historical gay world, and the many and diverse meanings that men from these different communities made of similar behavior and sexual practices, further complicating any hope of a single gay narrative. However, the broader and more disruptive implications of his arguments are understated, perhaps strategically so. It remains for Chauncey's readers and reviewers to pursue these many possibilities.

Gender/Masculinity

Central to the gay world that Chauncey constructs, from the late nineteenth century, were the "fairies," the most public and least retiring of its members. Fairies were men of working, or sometimes middle-class, origins, recognizable through their practices of gender inversion, plucked eyebrows, rouged cheeks and swishy walk.

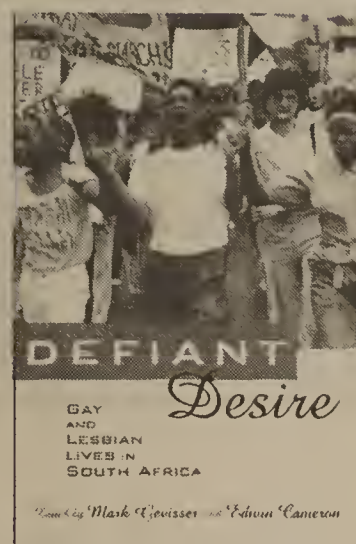
In the largely working class world of the Bowery, fairies were identifiable primarily by their affiliation with femininity, rather than by their sexual practices. In the late nineteenth century, the fairy identity was the most obvious one to assume for men whose desires led them to seek out other men as sexual partners. As fairies, they assumed a persona that made them obvious objects of desire for "normal" men in search of sex. This led to the phenomenon of middle-class men who were "part-time" fairies, leading a professional life uptown during the week and a social and sexual life in the Bowery on the weekends. These men usually employed a fairy pseudonym for their second life and lived with the constant fear of exposure.

By contrast, queer men, who identified themselves primarily by their sexual attraction to other men, appeared first in middle-class culture. Queer men did not necessarily display the effeminate behaviors of the fairies, though they identified themselves as part of the gay world. They largely sought sexual partners of their own type, other discreet, middle-class men. They viewed their affiliation with fairies as tenuous at best, acrimonious at worst, yet adapted many of the "camp" codes for use in their own subtle (and largely private) rituals of initiation and courtship.

Chauncey disputes the three conventional images of pre-Stonewall gay life— isolation, invisibility and internalization—by disputing the historical use of what he calls, "the image of the closet."

Embedded in Chauncey's narrative is necessarily the story of how men relate to/produce themselves *as men*. While Chauncey narrates the interrelatedness of heterosexuality with homosexuality, of normality with deviance, he sometimes fails to interrogate the shifting imperative of masculinity, even though the opportunity appears in his text. One example is the complex shift in language from fairy to queer to gay that he describes in detail. Chauncey uses this shift to ground his discussion of the multiple and changing meanings of homosexual behavior prior to the consolidation of the hetero/homo divide. But these shifts must also be read politically as the history of a strategic effort by some men engaged in homosexual practices to cling to certain privileges of normal "masculinity." As Chauncey's text makes clear, the consequences for relinquishing those privileges were potentially harsh: gang rape, forced prostitution, being viewed by men as an object of sexual use in a culture where manhood was constantly reasserted through the dominance of women, even when that "woman" was a biological man. Chauncey notes the attacks on Ralph Werther, a middle-class, part-time fairy who wrote under a pseudonym about his experiences in the sexual underground. "Werther reported that he had been subjected to gang rapes by several of the Irish and Italian youth gangs he approached. *In this his fate was no different from that of women whom men considered sexually available; if fairies were tolerated because they were regarded as women, they were also sub-*

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continued from previous page

ject to the contempt and violence regularly directed against women." (emphasis mine). Even within the gay world, the implicit denigration of fairies for their femininity, their womanliness, covered over a lack of self-consciousness about what it meant that their "brilliance" held the gaze of the curious

and the hostile, thereby opening a hidden and protected space for passing queer men. Chauncey notes, "Given the risks involved in asserting a visible presence in the streets, most gay people chose not to challenge the conventions of heterosexual society so directly ... Whereas fairies used codes that were intelligible to straights as well as to gays..., other gay men (the "queers") developed codes that were intelligible only to other men familiar with the subculture, which allowed them to recognize one another without drawing the attention of the uninitiated..."

If the violence against fairies represented, in part, attitudes toward women, what was the reaction to women who attempted to usurp the prerogatives of men? Describing the development of neighborhood enclaves, Chauncey relates the saga of Eve Addams' tearoom in the Village. Eve Addams was the pseudonym for Eva Kotchever, "a Polish Jewish emigre" and a lesbian, whose tearoom boasted a sign, "Men are admitted but not welcome." Chauncey describes the raid, in June of 1926, that closed the club, and resulted in the imprisonment and deportation of its popular owner. He also reports neighborhood speculation that it was orchestrated by a Village journalist/gossip, Bobby Edwards, as part of a concerted crusade against "the visibility of lesbians in the Village." He does not, however, comment about the distinction between campaigns against lesbians and those against gay men. He never raises the gender dimension of a story in which all the verbal attacks he cites are both homophobic and misogynist. Chauncey misses the opportunity to raise explicitly the possibility that Edwards' vendetta against Eve might be particularly driven by her reputation as "man-hater," or by the threat represented by independent women like Kotchever and the other lesbian proprietors of the Village.

Looking at Harlem

With a rare thoroughness, Chauncey meticulously pursues the locations and sites of "gay life." His research breaks through the class and race barriers that often circumscribe historical work on modern homosexuality. For instance, Chauncey suggests that looking at Harlem, like looking at the Bowery, does not only add to but might reshape standard ideas about modern gay and lesbian history. The value and originality of his research in that direction cannot be overstated.

He specifies the importance of Harlem as a site where community tolerance was high and the gay life, though historically less well recognized than the Village, was lived most flamboyantly. A number of factors made this possible, including the Harlem entertainment scene, with its reputation for outlandishness and its large number of openly gay and bisexual entertainers and musicians. Chauncey does point out that Harlem, like other large cities was "rent by deep class and cultural divisions." He documents the tolerance of the poor and working class, migrant culture for whom swishy men were a part of the urban landscape, in contrast to the campaign against homosexuality by Black middle-class Harlem residents, led by ministers such as Adam Clayton Powell. He also describes the necessity for African-American professionals, even race activists, to remain closeted among their business and community associates.

It is interesting that in a period when much of the discourse on homosexuality, even within anti-vice crusades, was shifting to the medical and scientific arena, the African-American campaign in Harlem remained rooted in religious and moral grounds. Similarly, an Afro-American newspaper condemned a benefit ball for a Black southern school attended by Black and white, male and female impersonators, for "sully[ing] the name of the 'splendid' school, which 'stood for the making of manly men and womanly women, for... Christian character among the colored people.'" This raises the question: what was the relationship between an African-American led anti-gay campaign and political strategies of racial uplift? How were reactions to homosexuality shaped by the public emphasis on both moral regeneration and political enfranchisement, crucial to the political agenda of middle-class Black leadership?

Chauncey suggests that looking at Harlem, like looking at the Bowery, does not only add to but might reshape standard ideas about modern gay and lesbian history.



1930's film ad in *Gay New York*

Unfortunately, race, unlike gender and sexuality, never becomes a category of analysis within Chauncey's text. Inevitably then, race and ethnicity appear fixed and coherent over against the instability of other identity categories. As a result, the gay life of African-Americans, even within Harlem, and the homophobia that they

confronted, sometimes read as curiously decontextualized, ahistorical. This is troubling in contrast to Chauncey's efforts in the whole of the book to denaturalize and historicize categories of sexual difference.

This does seem to point to another tension within the book, the conceptual sacrifices made in an effort to hold together a disparate and divided "gay world." While Chauncey's review of the multiple sexual possibilities of the gay world of this period is stunningly researched, his efforts to hold all these configurations within that purview is strained. For example, despite his challenge to the power and longevity of the hetero/homo binarism, that split remains embedded in his narrative. Without that assumed divide, he faces great difficulty in how to define gay men or the gay world. Perhaps this is asking too much for a book that presents itself straightforwardly as an ethnographic account. Chauncey's explicit goal is "mapping" the sexual and social topography. As in the case of Harlem, this mapping does introduce new and largely unexplored areas of inquiry for the current generation of gay and lesbian scholars.

"the decline of the fairies...the rise of the closet..."

Chauncey disputes the three conventional images of pre-Stonewall gay life, isolation, invisibility and internalization by disputing the historical use of what he calls, "the image of the closet." The "closet" currently operates as a central metaphor of gay life. It has been used so frequently that it has made the crossover to mainstream culture where now heterosexuals "come out of the closet" about everything from having conservative political beliefs to eating kids' cereal. Embedded in that metaphor is the assumption that the history of the gay movement reflects the history of an *individual* coming out story. The "beginning" must be rooted in the demi-monde of the homosexual psyche, the sense of being both alone, and forced to hide one's "true" self in all important aspects of one's life.

Chauncey finds that the terminology of the closet is a relatively recent addition to the gay idiom. It does not appear in written evidence prior to Stonewall. He speculates that even his narrators' use of the term is retrospective. He argues that the contemporary use of "the closet," an image that relies on the impermeability of the homo/hetero divide, was produced by the isolation that characterized the homosexual community of the late forties and fifties. Applied historically, that metaphor may obscure more about the gay past than it reveals.

The pre-forties language for moving through the straight world was the conception of a "double life," or the image of masking and unmasking, in other words of "passing." The spatial metaphor for the gay life wasn't the closet but the "gay world." For instance, in the period his book covers, the existence of a vast gay world makes passing as straight hardly an individual experience. In mapping the sexual geography of the time, he suggests that the ability to enter and leave the baths or subway "tearooms" symbolized both the distance between the gay world and the straight, and the ease of crossing between them for those in the know. When weekends may be spent in the company of one's fellows and life may be centered around cocktail parties, the baths, and an array of bachelor quarters, the historical use of the closet, and its associations with loneliness and stigmatization, must be re-thought.

The Problem of Complicity

In considering how the huge, public "gay world" of New York was forgotten or lost to history, Chauncey points to the political consequences of a gay world that was visible and growing. He argues that the pervasive public presence of homosexuality on the streets and in the press in the 1920s and early 1930s, provoked a "powerful cultural reaction" that was fueled by the Depression, the post-war return to normalcy and the Cold War. The strategy assumed by the state was not the eradication of homosexuality, but its denigration and elimination from public view.

Following the repeal of prohibition in 1929, Chauncey describes the use of liquor licensing regulations along with censorship laws to ban both identifiable

homosexuals and *representations* of homosexuality from the public sphere. Using the threat of license revocation, the State Liquor Authority (SLA) in effect, deputized bar owners who policed their own establishments. Men or women identified as homosexuals, whether rightly or wrongly, were no longer welcome. In response to this situation, the first exclusive gay bars appeared. Advertised through word of mouth, subject to frequent police raids, and constantly changing locations, these bars became the primary alternative for quasi-public homosexual social life. Overnight, the gay world became completely segregated from the world of "legitimate" public sociability.

Various corners in hotel bars and some exclusive restaurants remained available to gay men who were willing and able to "pass." The tolerance of management required that these men remain invisible to the heterosexual patrons who might unknowingly occupy the same space. These men further refined the strategies originally developed for the "double life," wearing specific pieces of clothing, introducing certain topics of conversations, making subtle gestures that were intelligible only to other gay men. According to Chauncey, "Using such codes, men could carry on extensive and highly informative conversations whose significance would be unnoticeable to the people around them."

It is with such strategies in mind that Chauncey argues for a redefinition of the meaning of political resistance among current scholars and activists. This is the aspect of Chauncey's work that I feel most cautious about. The distinction between men who could and did pass, and fairies or queens, who could not/did not, was largely rooted in class, racial and gender differences. As Chauncey himself notes, the policing and containment of homosexuality in the post-prohibition period was based on fears about the fragility of gender arrangements, while these queer strategies of secrecy were dependent on whiteness, economic independence and the privileges of masculine access to public space. It is troubling to argue that these practices constituted political resistance without also discussing their *complicity* with the dominant social norms.

The gay male identity that developed among men who were "queer" but discreet seemed likely to abet the new strategies of containment that developed in the 1930s, because that identity was so predicated on secrecy and invisibility. Denied the option of *visible* public space, the expansion or reproduction of the gay male subculture faced much more formidable odds. It is interesting to consider to what degree these queer men, beholden to the *appearance* of the norms of respectability, were participants in the construction of the closet that came to aptly describe the experience of at least some lesbians and gay men in the harsh crackdown following the second world war.

"... things pleasurable..."

One of the most delightful moments in reading Chauncey's book came following his tracing of the etymology of the word *gay* within New York's complex sexual landscape prior to the 1940s. He found numerous historical connotations: "things pleasurable... *immoral* pleasures and dissipation... something brightly colored or someone showily dressed... the flamboyant costumes adopted by many fairies, as well as things at once brilliant and specious, the epitome of camp." For a moment I contemplated the challenge articulated by this "proper" history to the frequently antagonistic and occasionally narrow and stuffy debates about and within the gay movement, regarding gay politics, gay culture and gay studies. It was with pleasure that I imagined the disruption of those debates through the infiltration of the "flaming fairies," whose brash, loud and defiant takeovers of public space for "girl talk" might overwhelm all efforts to contain or limit the public space for queerness, whether in the service of cultural homogenization, respectability or institution building. I further imagined this disruption as both playful and ominous, unsettling to ourselves and to our political opposition. It inspired me to think about responding to the "overwrought" accusations of the religious Right with some flamboyant hysteria of our own. Chauncey's book serves as reminder and inspiration to practice the *gay* threat that lives in all of us.

Ann Holder is an associate editor of *Radical America* and a graduate student in history. She is a former writer for and longtime committed reader of GCN.

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Provocative



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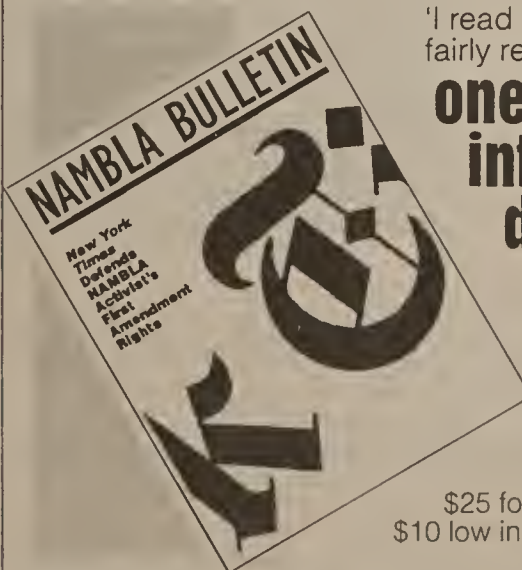
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Border Crossings

Lesbian Immigrants Weigh the Risks

by Tatiana Schreiber

As producer of a public radio series called "Other Colors: Stories of Women Immigrants," I recently interviewed over forty women who immigrated to this country during the past two decades. Three of the women identified themselves as lesbians, an identity that was part of their reason for leaving home. All three were well-educated in their own countries, and believe that this has made their experience as immigrants much easier than for many others. Still, they've encountered ignorance and fear, and have faced a difficult battle remaining here with their lovers, all of whom are U.S. citizens. One of the women (called "Sam" here) married a gay man to obtain permanent residency. For this reason, she is unable to reveal her name or country of origin.

Leaving Home

Valentina Páez is a composer and pianist from Venezuela. She studied jazz and Afro-Caribbean music in her country and says she had hit a ceiling there in terms of expanding her musical knowledge. She was living with a woman lover, and though she was out among friends, "in my family and in my professional life it was absolutely impossible to develop any kind of understanding." Valentina believed that she would not be able to develop her own feelings about her sexuality, or to deepen her relationship with her lover if they remained in Venezuela, so the two women came to the U.S. in 1987. Valentina came on a student visa, and now has a work permit obtained through the agency where she works as a mentor for young musicians.

As a teenager in South Africa, Jo-Anne Green had been involved with a girl who refused to call herself a lesbian. She knew of no out lesbians and there was no visible gay community. Later, while in art school, she got involved with another woman and "realized I really was a lesbian." Although her family knew she was gay, it was a matter of great shame, and living openly with her lover was out of the question. Desperate to get away so they could be together, Jo-Anne immigrated with her lover, arriving in Boston in 1983. She says she knew little about the gay community in the U.S.: "I wasn't aware of there being that much more freedom for homosexuals, but I knew that the U.S. at least pretended to be a democracy, which South Africa wasn't at the time." Although she now has a work visa, it must be renewed with every job, and her status remains tenuous, as it has been throughout her 12 years in Boston.

Sam left Europe while studying to become a secondary school teacher. In her country, she says, job opportunities in the field were extremely limited. She also needed to get away from her family. Although she'd been out as a lesbian at home, there is no legal protection for gay people in her country, and she felt the "repressive, paternalistic" society offered little opportunity for her to express herself. She thought the U.S. would be much more open. Sam arrived on a student visa and was determined to stay, by any means possible. She continued to renew her student visa each year and eventually married.

Although she now has permanent residency, she still feels that her appearance gives her away as a lesbian and "any moment, some immigration official at the border could make a real big stink and turn my life upside down." Recent changes in immigration law make it illegal to exclude non-citizens simply because they are gay, but many gay immigrants fear they will still be subject to more intense scrutiny when they cross U.S. borders.

Lesbian Communities and Cultural Identities

For all three women, integration into lesbian and gay communities here has been a complex process. Valentina was eager to meet other lesbians, but she found the Boston Latina lesbian community dispersed and hard to reach. She also found white lesbians kept her at a distance: "The shock was that I couldn't con-



Jo-Anne Green next to Mela Lyman's painting "Transfiguration."

nect with a culture that would accept my own way of being. [Instead, people] emphasized the differences: 'You are Latina, I am white, therefore what we share is that we are lesbians, but very clearly this is your own territory and this is mine.' That was very painful to me."

As a musician, however, Valentina did find support for her work, and she began to offer her services as a composer. She's currently working with a women's dance company that is multiracial, intergenerational and includes both straight and lesbian women. She says she finds that people in the U.S. tend to separate their personal and professional selves far more than in Venezuela. She doesn't want to live with that separation, but on the other hand, she appreciates the greater sense of personal boundaries here: "I think it's a very Latin thing, that there's always your extended family around and there's this belief that you can say everything and it doesn't matter who hears. I'm accepting that it's okay, and a good thing, to set some boundaries."

Sam says that both lesbians and straight people in this country tend to be disinterested in the experience of non-Americans. Because she didn't speak English well when she arrived, "people thought I was stupid and that they couldn't really talk to me...but, whatever they would have picked to talk about, I probably could have struck up a pretty decent conversation if they would have given it a try."

Sam also finds that although this society *does* allow more personal freedom than her home country, it comes at a cost: "Here, everything is based so much on the individual—individual abilities, and whatever you make of yourself is what you become. In my country the good of the community is always more important than the benefit of the individual, so it's much more important that there's a good welfare system that benefits everybody, or that there's basically a good standard of living for everybody, and that's something I really miss."

Jo-Anne's acceptance among white lesbians was easier because she is white and speaks English, yet other aspects of her identity can remain invisible:

The irony for me is that because I am white there is always the assumption that I'm the same. I've had to educate my lesbian friends and my artist friends about my culture. My African identity wasn't visible, at first....I spent years trying to dig through my family's personal history, as Jews from Eastern Europe [thinking that] if I got to know my family from as far back as possible I would find an identity. The more I engaged in that self-examination, the more I realized I couldn't separate who I was from the environment in which I grew up. I didn't grow up in Lithuania, I grew up in South Africa, and who I was was informed by everything I felt and heard and experienced on the African continent.

Working in the anti-apartheid movement [in the U.S.] over a period of seven or eight years I changed from someone who felt enormous guilt about the privilege I grew up with, to becoming more comfortable with the fact that yes I am white but I am also African. A

large part of this happened in the process of my art-making, because I met people who saw my work as South African, and I had never thought of it that way. For example, my color sense was clearly from another place; the tactile qualities of the work, and I guess, just the pain that the work exudes, which makes it not really fit [in the U.S. mainstream art world], but I'm pretty sure it would fit in South Africa.

Jo-Anne says that while in South Africa she was so isolated as a lesbian, and so isolated from the anti-apartheid movement, that her work reflected her denial. Once in the U.S., the distance enabled her to confront pain—the pain of apartheid, separation, and torture, as well as her own chronic physical pain as a

Jo-Anne's art is about racial oppression, and it is also "about my coming out as a lesbian, and my own feeling of exile; even though it was self-imposed, it didn't make it any less painful to be away from South Africa, and to be trying to establish a new life over here."

Green Card Marriage: "I wouldn't necessarily recommend it...."

"Sam's" greencard marriage was so difficult that she and her lover nearly split up over it. This is her story, with some of the details changed to protect the "innocent." Sam points out that there are hefty fines for "fraudulent" marriages, and people's lives are at stake. She chose to speak out in order to provide some insight for those who say "why don't you just get married?"

"I would certainly have married my lover if that were possible, but it wasn't. So when my student visa was to expire and I met a gay man who offered to marry me, I thought it was a terrific idea. We were a little wary since we didn't know each other well, but we began to work out some details. We thought we should all four live together (my lover and I, and he and his lover) because you must have all this documentation, like bills in the same name, and you must know details like where he keeps his underwear...

"We did move in together, and for me it was awkward to live with men all of a sudden, men I didn't really know. Pretty much right away tensions developed. I'm a very private person and I don't like to have a lot of people around when I get home from work; one of the guys was very sociable, he liked having a lot of friends over for dinner often...so we had a lot of traffic in the house. Looking back I was pretty crabby and unreasonable, but there was just a lot of miscommunication going on.

"We got married a few months later. We tried to work out our problems, but then more tensions developed, with people quitting jobs, or being unhappy at work, and our immigration interview coming up.... We had to rehearse for that, and there was just tension all the time, all the time.

"When you get married you get a temporary green card. You file the papers and leave a fingerprint, and after a year and a half you file more papers. You have to show some documentation, so you march in there, husband and wife, with your wedding album and bills and letters and everything you have to document the wedding and the marriage. An immigration officer sits in front of you, and if that immigration officer thinks that everything is fine you get your stamp and your papers and you may go home and that's the end of the story. It could also be that that immigration officer feels that it's not quite enough that is shown. Then you are led away, immediately, into two separate rooms, with two different people interviewing you, where they ask the same, I think 100 questions, and then they compare the answers that each of you gave separately, and that is what everybody is afraid of—even straight couples don't necessarily pass this test—I mean who remembers what they gave to the mother-in-law last year as a Christmas present, you know?

"So, we had to rehearse, in case we had to go for the individual interviews. You know, how do we sleep together, how does she brush her teeth, how do we like having sex together....We made up these fictitious married lives, and for a couple of weeks we had regular practice sessions, and we had little books where we wrote things down—birthdays, mother's birthdays ...we made all these things up—part of it was really funny, we coached each other...

"My partner's parents were supportive.... My husband's mother visited us and she agreed to have her picture taken with us for documentation. I don't think my parents, although I explained the situation

to them, ever really grasped it—because when I showed the wedding pictures my mother was all excited about how good that man looked that I married, and was asking me about grandchildren!

"Our lawyer—we never told him and he never asked. He treated our case like any case and he gave us the same advice he would give any other couple. You must document everything. When we went on outings, parties, or apple-picking, we'd take pictures. So we made sure we had different pictures, in different costumes, with different friends; every other month we'd make sure to have some nicely posed picture of some event...and letters addressed to both of us, so we made a huge effort, and overwhelmed them with material. We handed in a whole shoebox full of materials, a hiking boot shoebox, and I think that did overwhelm them.

"When we went for our interview, it was actually very funny. We had this very detailed plan. I let my hair grow in the months before....My haircutter was so proud but I thought 'Oh, my god, I can't recognize myself anymore.' The day of the interview we both dressed up really nicely. He wore a suit and I also had this silk suit, and this nice blouse. I made myself look really femmy, and I had some nice pointy shoes...stuff I'd never wear, I bought it just for the occasion, like we bought all these outfits for the wedding. Then we had to wait for our lawyer. My husband, he was so nervous, he had to go to the bathroom five times before the interview! Finally the lawyer came and tried to calm us down, and then we went up there and had to wait some more. I think that's a thing they do, they make you wait at every turn....

"So finally someone came and got us, and our attorney went in with us, and there was this grey desk, and grey walls, with paperwork everywhere, and this immigration officer sitting there. He asked when we got married and we stated the date, and he looked through our wedding album. We had made such a nice wedding album! So the officer leafed through the album, and then asked us a question and the question was: 'Where did you meet?' and my husband and I, we had rehearsed that exact same question, and as the immigration officer asked the question I had to smile this really sickly sweet smile. As I started the smile I looked at my husband and he looked at me with that same sickly sweet smile, and we said our sentences that we had rehearsed, and then we turned our heads and smiled at the immigration officer, and he just said, 'Oh, that's wonderful...' and that was it. We didn't forget our lines, and it wasn't even that wrong...we met at a friend's house at a dinner party....

"It was such a loving smile....[laughing] We both put up a really good act. We knew we had to."

"Towards the very end, when we were in the process of getting divorced, the underlying tension really sort of snapped, and it was very very hard. In the course of all that the relationship between me and my partner really suffered...and since the divorce and all of us moving out, it's taken over a year for our relationship to come together again to a point where things feel good to us.

"And the boys, they seem happy now, but there was a lot of unhappiness and tension for them also. And although overall it was worth it, it's not something I would necessarily recommend for other people."

Valentina Páez



For all three women, the question of whether to stay or return home is complicated by the rightward swing in U.S. politics

result of childhood injuries. Her complex, multi-layered paintings and sculpture have focused on people in exile, and their liberation. Many of her pieces are about racial oppression, and they are also "about my coming out as a lesbian, and my own feeling of exile; even though it was self-imposed, it didn't make it any less painful to be away from South Africa, and to be trying to establish a new life over here."

Green Cards and Marriage

Currently, there are few ways for immigrants to obtain permanent residency. You can apply as a first-degree relative (parent, child, or spouse) of a U.S. citizen, or prove that you have "exceptional abilities" (a term Congress has never defined) that no one else can offer. For artists, proving the latter is nearly impossible. And as Sam points out, even if you do fall into one of the categories for legal immigration, the process can take many years and isn't always successful: "As far as I know, this country is not saying to anybody 'please come.' Unless you're bringing millions of dollars, this country is not welcoming anybody.

"My basic belief is that nobody really wants to leave their home unless it's for very severe reasons."

she says. "The real question is why are people immigrating? If they immigrate because they have a better economic future in this country than in other countries, we really need to ask what we can do to make people feel they can stay where they are."

As far as gay immigrants in particular are concerned, recent changes in immigration policy make it possible to apply for political asylum here based on fear of persecution in their home countries. However, the criteria for making these claims is very narrow. Most immigration advocates believe one would have to risk death or torture in order to qualify. So Jo-Anne, Valentina and Sam all lived for many years with tenuous legal status. All three say that has placed stress on their relationships. Jo-Anne faced several periods of unemployment, and lived with the constant fear that she might be deported.

Yet neither Jo-Anne nor Valentina considered "fraudulent" marriage to a man in order to obtain a green card. Jo-Anne:

I feel like I'm being encouraged to live a lie for three years of my life. I get tired of people saying, 'Well, why don't you just get married?'...They consider that beating the system, [but] I actually consider that playing with the system and going along with it. I would much rather be able to get married to my lover and say 'this is who we are and we deserve exactly the rights that heterosexuals do in this country.'...I would rather be vocal about that and even become a test case in this country, but we've been told by numerous lawyers that we don't have a chance of winning at this particular time in history.

Valentina:

I will never marry to get a green card, not only because of the lying about it, but I think some part of me would die with it...because I am not going to be able to reproduce [the same] kind of celebration and intimacy that is only present in that moment [of a real marriage ritual]. I can't fake it. It only can be real. It's such a great lie and such a great amount of suffering that I don't want to go through.

Sam did marry for a greencard [see sidebar], after living for years with the anxiety of not knowing if her application to renew her student visa would be denied or accepted. Even now, she says, coming through immigration can be a nightmare:

Last time we came back [into the U.S.] from a vacation, my partner went through the American line and I had to go through the non-American line, and I was held up for a very long time. Of the three women in front of me, one was led away to an interview, which is a pretty scary thing, and all three had to produce paperwork for return flights, and show money and show travel routes. So by the time I came through the guy was so in the mode of harassing people that he proceeded to harass me, too, and my partner had to wait two hours for me—and we were both utterly exhausted after that experience, and that is after I had legal paperwork to come in. So, every time, it's still a big deal.

Staying or Going

For all three women, the question of whether to stay or return home is complicated by the rightward

swing in U.S. politics as well as changing conditions for gay people in their home countries. As Jo-Anne says, "I feel like I'm seeing a reversal. South Africa is becoming more liberated, while the U.S. is becoming more oppressive. To even think of abolishing the National Endowment for the Arts and public broadcasting—these are the things that made me want to stay here, but now the balance is shifting." In South Africa, in fact, the lesbian and gay rights movement is making advances and has managed to convince the ANC that the country's new charter should include gay rights. "It looks like utopia," Jo-Anne says, "but things aren't going to happen as quickly as people want, and [when Nelson Mandela dies or steps down] nobody can be sure what will happen."

Meanwhile, she feels prepared to stay here and fight the rightward trend in the U.S. She feels she can offer something unique from her experience in South Africa because she knows "how regressive these changes are and how excruciating it's going to be to rebuild after all the damage is done."

As far as going back to Venezuela, Valentina is skeptical about whether or not she could feel comfortable there with her lover. Although the society is changing, and she knows lesbians who live there openly, she can't quite believe it. At the same time, in the years since she's left, her family relationships have grown stronger and she has come out to her parents. "I think I have challenged my family so much, one by being the first in my family to leave and settle outside the frontiers of Venezuela, and two, by saying 'yes, I am a lesbian.' So the family values are being challenged, and they are being revised. I think they see me as an adult for the first time. They do not accept my sexual orientation. They live with it, but there is not acceptance."

Sam says the passage of Proposition 187 in California, which restricts public services for immigrants, has given her a scare, "because the real talk is about restricting benefits for legal immigrants...and I'm very concerned that things will get a lot tougher in the next few years. I'm worried that when I get to be retirement age, there will be a law on the books saying no more social security for legal immigrants." She's also afraid that soon the U.S. will make it more difficult for immigrants to become citizens, and citizenship will become a requirement for basic benefits in this country. Because of her fears, she is considering applying for citizenship, but "I want to keep the back door open because this country might turn out like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and I don't want to live in a fascist society."

For now though, like Jo-Anne and Valentina, she wants to stay: "Although it's very repressive here, it's also much more open than a lot of places in the world. I want to focus on the more positive things. I'm making a choice to stay here because I can be myself...and even though I can't participate in the [electoral] political process, I go to demonstrations, to rallies, and I do what I can."

Tatiana Schreiber is a freelance writer and radio journalist in Boston. Her radio documentary series, "Other Colors: Stories of Women Immigrants," was heard on public radio stations across the country in 1994. Her prior radio work includes programs on bilingual education and a series on women in prison.

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MAB SEGREST

Whose American History continued from page 9

self-critical, and wryly humorous. Her compassion for those she writes about and also for herself continually comes through. Nowhere is this more apparent than when she describes her response to the embattled integration of her high school in Tuskegee, Alabama in the early 1960s. She writes:

Then it was as if I were outside myself, looking down on Mab-under-the-bushes, and the Negro children, and the ring of policemen with their guns, and the white people with their hate. I knew how they [the children] felt then. They looked lonesome. They could be me. It was as if my heart went out of my body, out through the feet in front of me toward those small human figures crossing the school breezeway. Then they were upstairs and in the door, and it was over.

Although Schulman's persona is very much at the center of her writing, her voice is more distanced and especially in her commentaries tends toward flippancy and even sarcasm. In general *My American History* conveys a cynicism about the possibility of progressive political change and about other humans' capacity to make such change happen.

Segrest's primary focus, as indicated by her title, is race. She examines her racial origins as the daughter of class privileged white Southerners who upheld segregation. She describes her evolution from working solely in white Lesbian feminist contexts to becoming deeply involved in the struggle against racism and racist violence, eventually as director of North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence. She is able to synthesize her anti-racist politics with her commitment to battling homophobia and provides an incisive analysis of how these systems as well as those of economic and sexist oppression are inextricably intertwined.

Memoir of a Race Traitor makes an entirely unique contribution to white Lesbian and gay politics and literature. It is the only work I know, by a white, queer person, that is entirely dedicated to exploring this country's racial nightmare and her relationship to it. *Memoir* is in the great tradition of Lillian Smith, another anti-racist white Southern Lesbian writer, but Smith wrote in the middle years of this century and did not do so explicitly as a Lesbian. Segrest's work takes us further.

Memoir succeeds at the daunting task of demonstrating concretely what it means for a white person to take a meaningful level of responsibility for the racial terrorism under which people of color are required to live, at the same time confronting the heterosexism under which Lesbians and gays of all races, including Segrest, must live. The book is filled with wrenching accounts of murder after murder, most of them motivated by racism, but several caused by homophobia as well. I wish that every white person in this country would be required to read *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, but especially those white Lesbians and gays who assert whenever they are challenged to develop a political practice that might free somebody besides themselves: "But racism (or police brutality, or poverty, or genocide) is not our issue!"

Interpreting Our Political History

Schulman's book, on the other hand, shares her version of white Lesbian and gay activities in New York City during the last decade and a half. Schulman does not acknowledge that her generalizations are based almost entirely upon one geographic location and upon one race. An underlying if unstated purpose of *My American History* is also to discredit all political movements and organizing—feminist, left, peace, Lesbian and gay—up until the founding of Act Up and the



"Courageous and daring, this work testifies/documents the reality that political solidarity, forged in struggle, can exist across differences." — bell hooks

***Memoir* succeeds at the daunting task of demonstrating concretely what it means for a white person to take a meaningful level of responsibility for the racial terrorism under which people of color are required to live...**

Lesbian Avengers. The commentaries that follow her original articles contribute to rewriting and reinterpreting history so that when Act Up and the Lesbian Avengers emerge, they can do so in contrast to all of the misguided and ineffectual political work done before.

For example, in the introduction Schulman writes: "By the early eighties, feminism, as an activist grass-roots movement, was on the verge of collapse." As a Black Lesbian feminist activist who worked with both women of color and white women during this period, I remember this era quite differently. In fact the late 1970s and early 1980s were probably the most vital period of feminist of color organizing during the movement's second wave. In a speech entitled "Whatever Happened to Lesbian Activism", presented in 1991, she asserts: "Beyond the deaths of personal friends to AIDS I also came to ACT UP, over three years ago, because lesbians were no longer doing activist work." Again, this does not describe my experience nor that of Lesbian feminists activists all over the country, including in New York City, who never stopped organizing. It is disturbing that many of those who read this work will take such assertions at face value and not seek out other accounts of this crucial history.

Despite a capacity to be critical of racist exclusion in white Lesbian and gay contexts, Schulman's book is about Lesbian and gay experience, whitely defined. Because she never examines her own white skin privilege nor attempts to analyze racism in the society as a whole, there is no way that she can confront the race war that is being waged in this country nor offer strategies for stopping it.

Segrest, on the other hand, skillfully makes the connections between the necessity for the white Lesbian and gay movement to fight not only racism but capitalism, if it expects to pose an effective challenge to the Rightwing's homophobic campaigns. In the book's concluding essay, "A Bridge Not a Wedge," which was originally delivered as a keynote at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Creating Change Conference in Durham, North Carolina in 1993, she writes:

Our failure to understand racism is killing us. Maybe twenty years ago, our movement and institutions had the luxury of stupidity. Maybe twenty years [a]go, white queers could approach issues of racism out of guilt, or a desire to be liked, or to be "good." Maybe then we could offer token jobs and token recognition to people of color. . . In all those towns and cities where there are few links between visible gay organizations and people of color, such strategies [as the Traditional Values Coalition's racially divisive video, "Gay Rights, Special Rights"] are dangerously effective among both people of color and straight whites. The wildfire of the Right's insurgent fascism is sweeping down the canyons that divide us, and we must respond to racism now for our own survival—to save our little white asses. And we should be thankful for the opportunity.

Schulman's excitement about Act Up's style of organizing reflects a more limited view of what political work can accomplish. She praises the group's ability to pull off actions without working for broader agreement. Ironically, this characterization does not adequately recognize the history of well-known splits within Act Up—precisely over lack of agreement on issues of race, class and gender. In the commentary that follows a 1982 article on a Reproductive Rights National Network conference, she writes:

Schulman's excitement about Act Up's style of organizing reflects a more limited view of what political work can accomplish. She praises the group's ability to pull off actions without working for broader agreement. Ironically, this characterization does not adequately recognize the history of well-known splits within Act Up—precisely over lack of agreement on issues of race, class and gender. In the commentary that follows a 1982 article on a Reproductive Rights National Network conference, she writes:

This conference, was in many ways, typical of the old, pre-AIDS way of organizing. People from various political perspectives tried to hammer out "unity" on a variety of principles and came together to make proposals from their specific perspectives with the intention of lobbying for a particular analysis. . . . But with AIDS, ACT UP instituted a new, more efficient and flexible organizing style that was not predicated on agreement. And subsequently the most successful organizations in the gay community focused their discussions on concrete application of specific events, projects, and actions instead of on theoretical unity.

What Schulman does not see is that developing a shared political analysis within a group and unity around small matters like the need consistently to confront racial, class, and sexual oppression through organizing, not just talking, are the only conditions that make it viable for Lesbians and gay men of color, poor people, and women to do political work within majority white, middle class, and male groups. Without such "unity" we either refuse to participate or function as marginalized tokens.

In another commentary following her article, "The Left and Passionate Homosexuality," Schulman writes:

Ironically, ACT UP never really needed the support of the left because they did not operate within their confines. Many ACT UP members had *real world power* and so took their case directly to the general public and the government using direct action to generate a high level of media exposure. Tiny coalitions and *ghetto* organizing were not the forum for the efficient, necessity-organizing style that ACT UP continues to use to this day, where it is *a major player* in the international development of AIDS research strategy. [Italics mine.]

Schulman states repeatedly how much she has gained from working with men who are so much more politically effective than women because of their "higher sense of entitlement" and she attributes Act Up's and other AIDS organizations' great success to "the gay community's huge financial resources." She does not mention that all men do not have this level of privilege, namely men of color, and working class and poor men. Nor does she account for the historic effectiveness of political movements like the Civil Rights, Black liberation, and Black feminist movements that have been comprised almost entirely of people without material privilege or social status, many of whom actually live and organize in "ghettos."

Models of Political Organizing

Schulman advocates a rather frightening model of a gay and Lesbian realpolitik. The successes she describes are comprised of zaps, media splashes, one time street actions and privileged access to the media and the corridors of governmental power. It also concerns me that such media driven, confrontational tactics around single issues often get characterized as "radical," simply because they diverge from the mainstream lobbying and electoral model. The term radical is used without explaining what truly radical and revolutionary organizing might look like in the present nor how radical grassroots movements have successfully transformed societies throughout history. In contrast to the limited strategies promoted by Schulman, *Memoir of a Race Traitor* does provide a concrete example of an alternative political model. One of its greatest gifts is how well it depicts the painstaking work of grassroots organizing and of coalition building that challenges state power and empowers individuals within actual communities where diverse constituencies live side by side.

"Freedom Rides"

My own encounter with the Lesbian Avengers in 1993 raised in practice the shortcomings of the politics that Schulman advocates in *My American History*. The New York City chapter planned to do a "Freedom Ride" through the Northeast to call attention to anti-gay ballot initiatives and had chosen Albany as one of their stops. Schulman describes this incident as follows:

The only major political obstacle came in Albany where a small political group organized by the writer Barbara Smith objected to us using the name "Freedom Ride," which they said would be insulting to black heterosexuals. The Avengers discussed this criticism with the utmost seriousness and came to a unanimous decision among sixty women to continue with the name "Freedom Ride." Some of our reasons were as follows. First, the black, Latina and Asian women in the Avengers all wanted to keep the name. We recognized that there is as much difference of opinion among lesbians of color as among white lesbians or any other group, and, while Barbara had her reasons for her

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Prison & AIDS continued from page 13

with the AIDS crisis. Over the years, legal actions, including class action law suits, have been important in establishing the principle that prison health care should be set at a comparable standard to that available in society at large. The fight by women in prison for adequate health care has been particularly difficult. The strategy of pursuing class action suits on behalf of prisoners with AIDS may in the long run be the most effective way to compel prison systems to take remedial steps. Such suits insist on the constitutional right of prisoners to freedom from cruel and unusual punishment.

To answer the question how is it that the prison AIDS crisis has reached such bleak and devastating proportions, we need to consider the broad societal context of AIDS and incarceration. We also need a specific analysis of prisons and their management to expose how it is that, in the second decade of the AIDS crisis, with seroprevalence among prisoners continuing to rise, many prison systems simply do not have an HIV prevention or education policy. In the meantime, there is a dark irony to the fact that legislators continue to seriously debate subjecting prisoners to mandatory testing while those prisoners who are already aware of their status and actively seek medical attention routinely find themselves deprived of adequate care.

Trevor Hope & Peggy Hayes are active in Boston ACT-UP.

ACT UP/BOSTON ADVOCATES FOR PRISONERS

Members of ACT UP/Boston's Prison Issues Working Group have long demanded and aggressively worked for quality health care for all prisoners in Massachusetts, specifically prisoners with HIV and AIDS.

- ACT UP is one of the groups largely responsible for the formation of the Secretary of Public Safety's AIDS Task Force to advise the Department of Corrections.
- This was achieved through grueling hours of hearing testimony, meetings, rallying public support in coalition with prisoner and PWA advocacy groups, and last but not least, demonstrations.
- On December 1, 1993 ACT UP mounted a World AIDS Day demonstration at the State House and Department of Public Safety to protest the state's unwillingness to implement the recommendations of its own Prison AIDS task force.
- ACT UP members regularly attend AIDS Task Force meetings, meet with prison officials, recommend policy changes, and meet with current and former prisoners, we write letters, call our representatives, call the press and demonstrate.
- To get involved or for more information call: (617) 49-ACT UP or attend a meeting any Tuesday at 7pm at the Boston Living Center. ACT UP is a diverse coalition of women and men united in anger and fighting to end the AIDS crisis.

Lesbian & Gay Past continued from page 10

in mainstream institutions—including Columbia University, the Schlesinger Library, and the New York Public Library—otherwise unidentified as relevant to lesbian history. Radical historians and community-based archives have assumed the interpretive risks and should be rightly recognized for championing and preserving what we know of lesbian and gay pasts—for bringing "out" and keeping "out" our history.

The New York Public Library's "Becoming Visible" exhibit this past summer trumpeted the arrival of lesbian and gay history to New York's cultural mainstream. The exhibit was a significant political marker, both shaping and reflecting our Coming Out in new territory. Billed by New York Public Library as the country's first "major" exhibition on the topic (though several exhibits have been assembled by community-based organizations), "Becoming Visible" was extensive, informative, and teaming with implications about inveterate historical institutions and their stake in representing lesbian and gay lives.

The failure of "Becoming Visible" is that the New York Public Library denied its own role in secreting lesbian and gay history, and diminished the contributions of self-documenting people in bringing us this exhibit. "Becoming Visible" existed in its depth and variety because lesbian and gay people have waged a battle for historical survival in the face of systemic disrespect by institutions such as the New York Public Library.

In keeping with mainstream library and archival tradition, the "Becoming Visible" logo on the enormous banner strung over the steps of the New York Public was a coded one. It read: "Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall." For most gays and lesbians, the pink triangle incorporated into the graphic, along with the word "Stonewall" were tip offs that there was an exhibit of interest inside. The absence of the words gay or lesbian allowed anyone else to remain oblivious to the nature of the exhibit. Becoming Visible, indeed.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives provided the Library with the backbone of material and referrals used for the lesbian part of the exhibit. Neither in the exhibit itself, though, nor in the plethora of promotional and fund-raising material was there significant information about the Lesbian Herstory Archives or any other contributing organization. At the insistence of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, curators assembled a *Donors and Lenders* panel only days before the exhibit opened. It represented a break with New York Public's practice, exhibit curator Mimi Bowling told me, in that it was the first time the Library recognized lenders in such a "prominent" fashion in any curated exhibit. But the panel's location well to the left of the entrance was hardly conspicuous. The financial contributors' names were, on the other hand, quite prominently displayed at the exhibit's entrance. "This exhibit is not about community building," was the reported response of the Library's administration, adhering to their "policy" not to acknowledge or promote other collections over their own. Instead, the exhibit was falsely framed to appear as though it was berthed from the stacks, goodwill, and native savvy of the New York Public Library.

"Becoming Visible" obviously broke with traditions of exclusion and deep closeting in significant ways, but the New York Public Library as an insti-

tution still embodies a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy regarding lesbian and gay lives, allowing mostly the bold, the lucky, the hungry, or the particularly persistent ones to expose a history buried in the stacks.

Gay and lesbian history is tangible today because lesbians and gays had the will and determination to constitute and reclaim histories by writing books and building presses, and by establishing community-based archives and history projects. These are the places where we have recorded stories of lesbian and gay lives and honored their richness. It is an appropriation of our community's work and a misrepresentation of our collective history that the Library obscures the contributions of the community-based institutions it depended on to assemble this exhibit. It is as if the Library fears that to tell these truths might disqualify it from the credibility it now craves, the status it always expects, the gay funding it now seeks.

With mainstream archives focusing on the collections of well-known gays and lesbians, it will be the community-based archives that continue to collect and embrace the unrecognized heroism of lives lived on the sexual margins. Community-based archives push the boundaries of acceptance, putting history to work for us. It is essential that in our enthusiasm to achieve mainstream recognition that we not neglect or impoverish community-controlled history projects because this would be a bargain struck with the sacrifice of self-definition. We must continue to invest in our own communities, taking charge of our histories to ensure that lesbian and gay lives are not packaged to ease another's understanding.

Polly Thistlethwaite has been a volunteer with the Lesbian Herstory Archives since 1986. She is also a reference librarian at Hunter College. She wishes to thank Amy Beth, Rachel Lurie, and Maxine Wolfe for their contributions to this article.

QueerWorld continued from page 6

British courts have maintained consent is not a defense in sex acts where "bodily harm" is committed, but the European Commission disagreed. The commission will try to settle the case directly with the British government. If that fails, it will go to the commission's committee of ministers or the European Court of Human Rights. Both the European Commission and European Court are part of the Council of Europe, a human rights organization formed by 33 nations.

Spain considers gay 'partner' legislation

MADRID—Spain's government will consider creating registered partnership for gay and straight couples this spring. Legislation written by gay groups has received support in the media, regional parliaments, and the federal parliament. Although adoption rights are not included in the legislation, gay men and lesbians in Spain can already adopt children.

Queerworld was compiled by Stephanie Poggi with thanks to Marla Erlien's E-mail and information from Elliott Young, Rex Wockner, Irina Glushchenko, Tyrone Newhook, and the International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission.

Whose American History continued from page 23

objections, the women of color in the Avengers felt that we were using the name legitimately. We said that if people were offended by lesbians placing ourselves firmly in the tradition of the other freedom movements then they were homophobic....Finally we felt that our Freedom Ride was in the best tradition of the Freedom Rides of the sixties because it involved people literally moving geographically to defend a community that they identify with when they are under siege. At stake are basic civil rights protections that could not be denied.

Schulman goes on to explain that as a result of the criticisms we raised in Albany, the Avengers showed the video "Gay Rights, Special Rights" in the cities where they stopped to encourage discussion about racial divisions and the Rightwing's manipulative tactics.

What actually occurred in Albany was that Mattie Richardson, my co-worker at Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press and a friend of one of the Avengers, was contacted about organizing housing and other support for their visit. As soon as Mattie learned that they were calling this activity a "Freedom Ride," she expressed great concern about their appropriating this term from the Black Civil Rights movement, especially since the Avengers had not publicly put forth an anti-racist analysis or practice. For example, they had made little effort to contact and work with people of color organizations in the cities they planned to visit.

Mattie organized a meeting of both women of color and white women which she asked me to attend. Some of us had worked together in the past and some of us had not. We discussed the impact that the Lesbian Avengers' "Freedom Ride" might have upon our ongoing efforts to raise the issues of homophobia and sexism in Albany's Black communities, especially because the Avengers were known to prioritize high profile media coverage and because we also knew how relatively easy it was to get mainstream media coverage in Albany.

We objected to the term "Freedom Ride" not merely because it "would be insulting to black heterosexuals," but because it was insulting to us—Black Lesbians who are not homophobes. In order to legitimately place oneself "firmly in the tradition of the other [Black] freedom movements," we believed that it was also necessary to place oneself firmly and actively into the current work of anti-racist movements. The Freedom Rides began as early as the 1940s, but became widespread in the early 60s. They were in fact organized to protest segregated seating on interstate buses and segregated public facilities at bus terminals, specifically rest rooms, waiting rooms, and restaurants. They were not primarily based upon the principle of "moving geographically to defend a community." Thus the Avengers' use of "Freedom Rides" functioned to displace the history of the Black Civil Rights Movement, not to carry their work forward into the ongoing battle against racism.

In a commentary about the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization's efforts to march in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade, Schulman herself provides the rationale for what our group organized to do in Albany. She writes:

But what was also at stake in this case was a larger political question. Namely—when gay people make a stand within their own host ethnic, religious, or racial community, do they have a right to determine their own positioning and strategy? I believe they do. And this right must be clearly asserted to assure all gay people a place of self-determination within the larger gay community.

It is unfortunate that Schulman did not extend this "right" to Black Lesbians in Albany.

Politically, these are very frightening times and it will no doubt get worse before it gets better. It is obviously past time for us to figure out how to work with some of the very people that the Rightwing has already reached so effectively. This means that at least some of the time we will be working with people who are not as hip or progressive as we think we are, people from whom we will certainly learn a lot. As Mab points out, we had better learn to do this kind of coalition building and grassroots movement building right quick if we want to have half a chance of living in a functioning democracy in the twenty-first century. *Memoir of a Race Traitor* is a great handbook, a source of inspiration and strength to take along the way.

Barbara Smith is currently researching the first book-length history of African American Lesbians and gays. She is also actively involved in the Feminist Action Network's project "Black Communities United Against Bigotry and Hatred," which is challenging homophobia in the Black community in Albany, New York.

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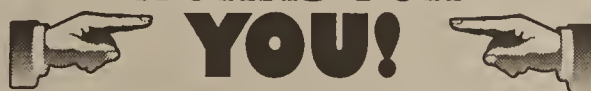
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Side Dish

by Elizabeth Pincus

If the end of 1994 found the most promising baby dyke in the movies—*Little Women's* Jo—marrying a man, at least 1995 got off to an intriguing start. First, Lili Taylor rang in the new year with not one but two butchy turns as queer artistes with attitude: poet Edna Ferber in *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*, and a non-nonsense photojournalist marooned in Paris in the otherwise dismissible *Pret-a-Porter*. Next, in *Higher Learning*, Jennifer Connelly showed her lavender stripes as the most earnest screen lesbian since Maria Schneider in *A Woman Like Eve*. Then, an icon no less luminous than Whoopi Goldberg came busting onto the screen as a full-blown, not-shy-of-the-“L”-word lesbo in *Boys on the Side*, and mainstream movies as we know ‘em took another convoluted step toward the new millennium. After all, it’s been a decade since Goldberg played gay—and we all remember the subterfuge surrounding Celie’s lesbianism in *The Color Purple*. By contrast, the brash, ballsy *Boys on the Side* opens with Goldberg crooning Janis Joplin’s “Piece of My heart,” a crude if amusing invitation to revel in sisterhood. This is progress, I suppose, albeit of an extremely calculated sort.

Of course, Goldberg, Connelly and Taylor don’t really get any girl-on-girl action in their recent go-rounds. Connelly comes closest (her lips actually meet Kristy Swanson’s), but her dewy-cheeked dyke is more a puzzle piece in a schematic of inclusivity than a flesh-and-blood character. Taylor is even more unrealized, in both her roles, though she cuts a fine figure in a suit and tie, and that counts for something in the ongoing wrangle for queer visibility in the movies. And give Taylor credit for adventuresome career choices: in her next movie, Abel Ferrara’s *The Addiction*, she plays a philosophy student-cum-vampire who succumbs to the intimate, blood-drenched attentions of Annabella Sciorra. Talk about girl-on-girl action.

Boys on the Side in particular is disappointingly void of overt sexuality. It has the chutzpah to boast choice exchanges like this one—Scumbag Dude: “What’s sex like without a dick?” Goldberg: “I don’t know. You tell me.” Then the film refuses to cough up a viable love interest for Goldberg. Instead, she’s granted a platonic crush on the movie’s tragic heterosexual, turning a heretofore bawdy romp into a picture that’s suddenly maudlin and sterile. It’s as if director Herbert Ross and screenwriter Don Roos want credit for their pretty scenario of multi-culti, pan-sexual tolerance, but won’t risk anything they (erroneously) think will startle the mobs at the multiplex. Yup, it’s *Philadelphia* all over again, with a schlocky, *Terms of Endearment* gloss and a dash of comic vulgarity to demonstrate its supposed hipness.

Gripping aside, *Boys on the Side* is still a hoot and a holler, and surely the best cheap thrill I’ve had at the movies since, um, *The Quick and the Dead*. Not only is it a guaranteed good time, but it’s our Hollywood film of the year: it’s *Bad Girls*, *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Thelma and Louise* all rolled into one. It even co-stars Drew Barrymore and Mary-Louise Parker, renowned flirts from two of those earlier cinematic peaches (Barrymore, in particular, ignites any project she deigns to sashay through). When Goldberg first hits the road with her cuddly blond sidekick, she scolds, “I’m not going over a cliff for you two, so just forget it!” further plunking *Boys on the Side* in the center of a total woman-loving Zeitgeist. As if we didn’t already get it.

The set-up is pure soap suds: Jane (Goldberg), a hardbitten, East Village club singer recently dumped by her girlfriend, is eager to try her luck in Los Angeles. Seeking a companion for the ride west, she’s saddled with the most white-bread woman in New York, Robin (Parker), a prissy real estate agent with demons of



photo: Suzanne Hanover

Boys on the Side refuses to cough up a viable love interest for Goldberg. Instead, she’s granted a platonic crush on the movie’s tragic heterosexual.

her own to exorcise. This odd couple picks up a third in Pittsburgh, Jane’s friend Holly (Barrymore), a creampuff with Jean Harlow-esque sass and a mean swing of a baseball bat. Kind of a tragicomedy with a little road-tripping thrown in to snare the bohemian in all of us, *Boys on the Side* is a family-values lovefest that blossoms when the comely crew escapes the complicated East Coast and finds camaraderie on the highway, and amidst the kicked-back sprawl of Tucson.

There, with no visible means of support, Jane, Robin and Holly drink, cavort, hang at a local dyke bar, and partake in all manner of things Southwestern. Among the trio, one is heartbroken, one pregnant and the other sick, which makes sense when you consider the weepy oeuvre of director Ross (*Steel Magnolias*, *The Turning Point*, *The Goodbye Girl*). At least the screenplay isn’t half bad, derived though it may be from about a million previous projects; there’s even a beaver conversation not unlike the honey-pot roundtable in *Go Fish*. Somehow, the word “cunt” has a certain resonance when bandied about by Goldberg and Parker. Too bad Barrymore is off romancing a cop during this precious exchange.

Boys on the Side aims for insider appeal, but—in trying so desperately to please—it waxes outrageously hokey. The happy portrait of cultural, racial and generational harmony, for example, defies belief. (Either that or Tucson is just another name for nirvana.) Meanwhile, listen up for the wink-wink soundtrack that spans the Sapphic dial from Janis to Melissa to the Indigo Girls, with Annie Lennox, Bonnie Raitt and Sheryl Crow included for honorary good measure. As an extra bonus, Goldberg assays the spirit of Karen Carpenter, which could be the trippiest moment of musical dissonance heard all year. The geeky-mod compilation of Carpenter covers has nothing on this mind-boggling bit of revisionism.

We’ve only just begun...to experience the 1995 crop of dyke movies, that is. Things are looking up, considering the handful of by-, for- and about-lesbian features on the horizon. Most exciting is the exquisite, inspiring Audre Lorde biopic by Michelle Parkerson and Ada Gay Griffin, *A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde*. And back on the soap-sudsy front, a pair of frothy romances are sure to catch the wave of fandom stoked by *Go Fish* (and, against all odds, *Claire of the Moon*). *Bar Girls* and *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*, directed by Marita Giovanni and Maria Maggenti, respectively, present juicy tangles of love and lust only alluded to in Hollywood trifles like *Boys on the Side*. *The Incredibly True Adventures*, especially, is charming and funny, poignant and raw, a wallow in pure movie pleasure. For the time being, it seems, it takes one to know one to illuminate one on the silver screen of our most public, and private, dreams.

Elizabeth Pincus is an LA.-based novelist and film critic. Her newest book, *The Hangdog Hustle*, will be published this fall by Spinsters Ink.

With a Chartreuse Tee-Shirt as his Armor

Lingering in a Silk Shirt by Walta Borawski.

(Fag Rag Books, Boston, 96 pages, \$18.95).

Reviewed by Neil Miller

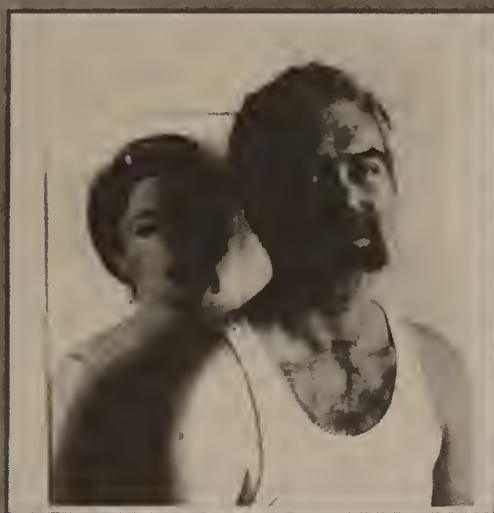
Of the gay confessional poets of his generation, Walta Borawski—who died last year of AIDS at age 46—was perhaps the most engaging. His voice was unmistakably direct, unpretentious—and he was infatuated with the icons of pop culture, as if Frank O'Hara, the "city poet" of '50s Manhattan had been transported to the fringes of '80s Harvard Square. In his last years, Borawski's acuteness of observation, his sense of optimism (and sometimes outrage), and his charm remained very much in evidence; his vision only deepened. His collection of poems, *Lingering in a Silk Shirt*, published just before his death, represents an attempt to understand what it means to have AIDS, to fix in time the everyday details—physical, emotional, sexual—and to try and force them to make sense. It is a document of passion and perseverance, of emotional fortitude and sexual desire, that is by turns, funny, shocking, and moving.

Lingering in a Silk Shirt is not simply "about" AIDS. Borawski is far more interested in using AIDS as a lens to discover how the world really works. The poems offer a sense of heightened awareness that probes and attempts to pinpoint the paradoxes of life and art, desire and death. In "virus cutting" the poet finds himself caught between fear and ecstasy: "virus cutting me short—/ yet here I am with/ some show tune in my head. So insistent/ so splendid a lyric I can't/ get back to sleep/ This is a battle cry." Throughout much of *Lingering*, the fear of death and the intimate details of disease ("I've HIV/ To avoid PCP/ I inhale monthly/ AP, until in/ collusion with ddi/ it inflamed my/ pancreas") are juxtaposed with the transcendent possibilities of popular culture.

Appropriating Gay Icons

For Borawski, amid the physical and emotional distress, there is a sense of joy, one that comes in the form of Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand, Madonna, Billie Holiday, and (even) Mick Jagger. (The poet characteristically appears on the book's cover, pos-

LINGERING in a SILK SHIRT



Poems by WALTA BORAWSKI

In "Transition in Newsweek,"...[Borawski] deliberately mixes up the language of People magazine and of drug protocols in an effort to alter radically the way in which we conceptualize AIDS and fame, homosexuality and disease.

ing in front of a poster of Elizabeth Taylor.) Borawski appropriates these icons of gay culture, not simply to praise them but to use them as meditations on what it means to be a gay man living with AIDS. Billie Holiday's experience of racism is recalled when "two Aryan lads in a Toyota" yell "faggot" at the poet, and Madonna's version of a Stephen Sondheim song conjures up visions of rejection and not "getting your man." In "Artists and Hypochondria" the poet marvels at pianist Glenn Gould's legendary health obsessions: "O Glenn Gould,/ had you only survived to the age of AIDS." In "Transition in Newsweek," perhaps the most shocking poem in the book, Borawski imagines a world in which such celebrities as Mel Gibson, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Cruise, Mr. Rogers, and Pee Wee Herman all have AIDS. The poem deliberately mixes up the language of *People* magazine and of drug protocols in an effort to alter radically the way in which we conceptualize AIDS and fame, homosexuality and disease.

Writing against Disease

Lingering in a Silk Shirt is divided into four sections. The first, "Ragged Denim," concerns itself with the poet's past, his family, his lovers; the second, "Nylon Lycra," contains most of the poems about pop-culture figures. These sections, with their more reflective modes, prepare the reader for the intense emotionality of the second half of the volume. The "J. Poems" are a series of twenty-four love poems written to a young man whom Borawski befriends. The poems are clearly obses-

sional—the poet waits outside J's house; he attends Sunday Mass (even though this runs counter to his anti-religious convictions) hoping to "bump into" J.; he chooses his clothing in the light of what J. might like; he imagines sex with J. and how he will explain his AIDS diagnosis to him.

But the "J." poems are not simply a journal of obsession. They are an attempt to humanize and sexualize oneself in a culture that insists that disease renders us flat, hopeless, and without the possibility of sexual fulfillment. More than anything, the poems are about the need to reestablish oneself as a fully sexual and emotional being. The poet wonders, "How do I muster/ romance in the face of/ HIV infection, daily/ terrors & uncertainties,/ after several years of/ moving in a haze and getting/silly over no one?" In the process, J. emerges as a kind cross between Dante's Beatrice and a porn star, between a sexy, older brother and an angel of death.

"Blue Rayon," the last section of *Lingering in a Silk Shirt*, details Borawski's daily thoughts of mortality and his immediate presence in the world. Sometimes he is acutely aware of his physical being. In a prose-poem, "Celebrating the State of Non-Virus," he writes, "In late February, one of the least favorite stages of my least favorite season I came down with a virus, not the virus which I've already known since 1986, but a virus people get and talk about on tv and at work and on buses. Having the virus I never take a virus lightly, as the virus intensifies the minor discomforts of life, and one never knows." At other times, he is aware of loss. In "Garden Mystery," he observes that the snapdragons have disappeared from his garden: "But now it is /midsummer: The snapdragons are/ what is missing. It is I/ who miss them."

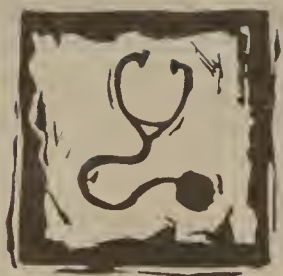
He's got the Beat

The poems in "Blue Nylon" move from a sense of desperation to a sense of relief; art and the imagination provide a route of escape. The pain is present here but it is sometimes eased, sometimes transformed by the ability to put pen to paper, to reimagine a world in which AIDS befalls Mel Gibson and Mr. Rogers, a world where ordinary garden flowers can represent your life.

Lingering in a Silk Shirt faces reality and attempts not so much to find beauty and solace in the midst of misery but to transform the physical, material world into something that resonates with life and approximates hope. *Lingering*, like Borawski's earlier collection, *Sexually Dangerous Poet*, vibrates with the beat of the popular song, of spoken language, and of articulated desire. The poet's language, like that of Frank O'Hara and Allen Ginsberg (the latter who praised Borawski's earlier poetry for its "mindful measure of spoken speech music"), manages to be direct but exalted, plain-spoken yet lyrical. The poems in *Lingering in a Silk Shirt* sing not so much about living with AIDS as what it means to exist in a world in which song and feeling, desire and will, can still exist. With "a chartreuse tee-shirt" as his armor and "to live" as his agenda, Borawski's poems are a hymn to survival and joy in the face of the inevitable.

Neil Miller is the author of *In Search of Gay America and the forthcoming survey of gay and lesbian history, Out in Our Past.*

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